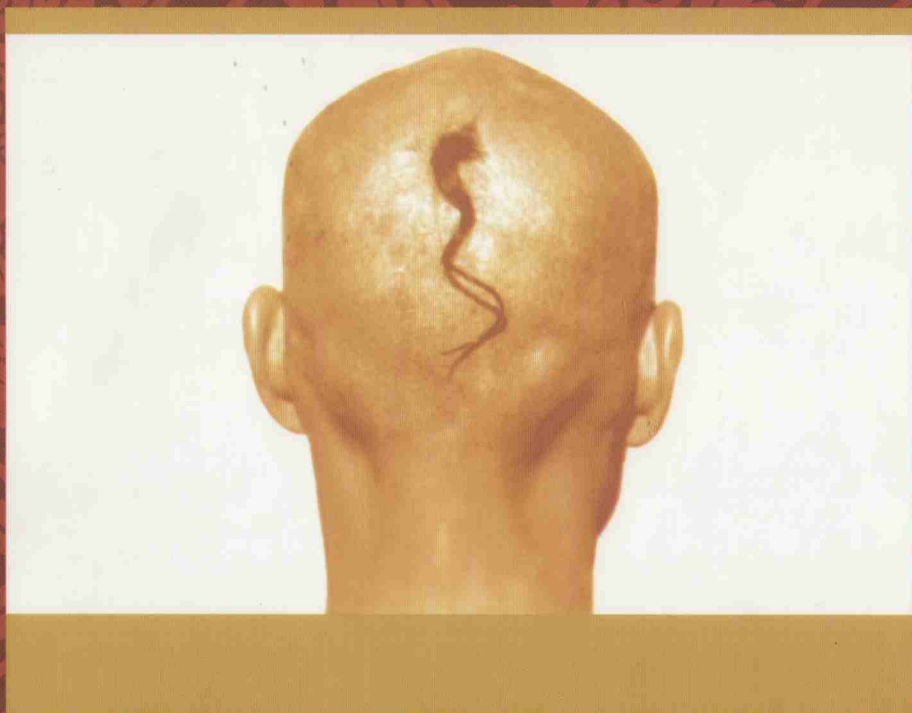


Steven J. Rosen



# Gaudiya Vaishnavism & Iskeon

An Anthology of Scholarly Perspectives



ISBN 81-8403-029-0

Published By: Rasbihari Lal & Sons.

Loi Bazar, Vrindaban-281121 (U.P.) India

Phone: 91-565-2442570

Fax: 91-565-2443970

E-mail: [brijwasi2001@hotmail.com](mailto:brijwasi2001@hotmail.com)

Our Other Division Brijwasi Exports

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written consent of the publisher. If you are interested in the purchasing or the distribution of this book or any of the publications on the following page, you may contact us.



## Our Other Publications

The Glories of Advaita Acarya  
Mystical Stories from the Bhagavatam  
Vedic Stories from Ancient India  
Aisvarya Kadambini  
Simple for Simple  
Srimad Bhagavat Tatparya  
Dasa Mula Tattva  
Gita Mala Song Book  
Gitavali Song Book  
Kalyan Kalpataru Song Book  
Saranagati Song Book  
Sri Bhagavatarka Marici Mala  
Sri Harinama Cintamani  
Sacred Cow  
The Twelve Mahajanas  
Vrindavana Dhama Ki Jaya  
Rasaraja Sri Gauranga  
Gita Govinda (By Gadadhara Prana)  
A Garland of Verses  
Sanskrit Bhagavad-Gita Grammar:  
    Vol-1 "Introduction"  
    Vol-2 "Exercise"  
    Vol-3 "The Gita"  
Advaita Prakash  
Prema Vivarta  
Caitanya Upanishad  
Genesis Renovated  
Katha & Kena Upanishads  
Sri Gaura Ganoddesa Dipika  
Devadasa  
Govinda Lilamrita  
Sri Gaudiya Kanthahara  
Dhamali (by Gadadhar Prana)  
Sri Gopal Sahasra Nama  
Sri Krsna Astottara Satnama  
Sri Radha Sahasra-Nama- Stotra  
The Life of Ramanujacarya  
Namamrta Samudra  
Narottama Vilasa

Sri Prem Bhakti Chandrika  
Lessons From The Ayurveda  
Sanskrit Gramar  
Caitanya Candramrtam  
Garuda Purana  
Life of Madhvacharya  
Padama Purana  
Skand Purana  
Sri Narad Puran  
Braja-Vilasa Stavah  
Mukta Caritra (The Pearl Story)  
Sri Manah Siksa  
Sri Sri Dana Keli Cintamanih  
A Handbook of Vaisnava Songs &  
    Practices  
A Vaisnava Harmonium and  
    Singing Method (With 2 tape)  
Practical Mrdanga Lessons (With  
    One Tape)  
Food for Peace (Cookbook)  
Astakala Lila Padavali  
Lalit Madhava  
Mathura Mahatmya  
Sri Krsna Caitanya Divya Sahasra-Nama  
Sri Radha Krsna Ganoddesa Dipika  
Vidagdha Madhava  
Hari Bhaktivilas Vol. 1-5  
Sri Krsna Lila Stava  
Sri Siksastaka  
The Mahabharata  
The Songs of Lochan Dasa Thakura  
Harivamsa Purana: Vol. 1-3  
Sri Narad Pancaratra: Vol. 1-2  
Srimad Bhagavadgita  
The Glories of Ekadasi  
From Nothingness to Personhood  
Narasimha Avatar  
The Four Principles of Freedom  
The Heart of Devotion

The Life and Times of Lord Chaitanya  
 The Lives of Vaishnava Saints  
 The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan  
 Vedic Archeology & Assorted Essays  
 Sri Gopala Tapani Upanisad  
 Sri Krsna Bhavanamrta Mahakavya  
 Sri Prem Samput  
 The Bhakti Trilogy  
 Sri Caitanya Bhagavata - Complete Edition  
 Sri Vrndavana Mahimamrta - only 17th  
 Chapter  
 Sri Vrndavana Mahimamrta - Complete  
 Edition  
 Garga Samhita  
 Bhakti Ratnakara  
 Sri Krsna Karnamrta  
 Jagannatha Vallabha Nataka  
 Camatkara Candrika  
 Sri Vrajariti Cintamani  
 Sri Caitanya Carita Mahakavya  
 Bhagavad Gita by Bhaktivinoda Thakura  
 Sri Uddhava-Sandesa & Sri Hamsaduta  
 Ujjvala-Nilamani  
 Jaiva Dharma  
 Bhavishya Purana, Vol. 1, 2  
 Sri Krishna-sandarbha, Vol. 1-3  
 Sri Paramatma-sandarbha, Vol. 1, 2  
 Sri Visnu-sahasra-nama-stotra  
 Sri Amnaya-sutra

**Gaudiya Vaishnavism and ISKCON:  
An Anthology of Scholarly Perspectives**

*Editor: Steven J. Rosen*

---

**PART 1/ GAUDIYA VAISHNAVISM**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction  | 1   |
| The Meaning of Gauḍiṣya Vaiṣṇavism/ STEVEN J. ROSEN                                   | 5   |
| Caitanya's Ecstasies and the Theology of the Name/ NORVIN HEIN                        | 20  |
| The Descent of the Holy Name/ ACYUTĀNANDA DĀSA  | 41  |
| Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā/ HOWARD J. RESNICK (H. D. GOSWAMI)                         | 49  |
| From Purāṇa-Veda to Kārṣṇa-Veda/ BARBARA HOLDREGE                                     | 77  |
| Appropriation and Subordination of Vedic Authority<br>/ TRAVIS CHILCOTT               | 117 |
| Divine Love in Gauḍiṣya Vaiṣṇavism and Catholic Mysticism<br>/ JUNE MCDANIEL          | 133 |
| The Bhakti-Rasa Theory of Rūpa Goswāmin/ NEAL DELMONICO                               | 153 |
| The Parā-Bhakti of the Gopīs/ ERIC HUBERMAN   | 177 |
| Rāsa-līlā Pañcādhyāya/ GRAHAM M. SCHWEIG  | 207 |
| Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya/ RAVINDRA SVARŪPA DĀSA   | 251 |
| Rūpa's Rādhā/ DONNA M. WULFF  | 273 |
| Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura and the Modernization of Gauḍiṣya<br>Vaiṣṇavism/ JASON D. FULLER | 295 |

## PART II/ ISKCON

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction  | 315 |
| Krishna and Culture/ TAMAL KRISHNA GOSWAMI & RAVI M. GUPTA                      | 319 |
| ISKCON's Place in the Bengal Vaishnava Tradition<br>/ CHARLES R. BROOKS         | 335 |
| Insider and Outsider Perceptions of ISKCON/ KIM KNOTT                           | 361 |
| 1965: It Was a Very Good Year/ BRUCE N. SCHARF & STEVEN J. ROSEN                | 379 |
| Tensions in Scriptural Transmission/ TAMAL KRISHNA GOSWAMI                      | 395 |
| Universal and Confidential Love of God/ GRAHAM M. SCHWEIG                       | 407 |
| Prabhupāda as Spiritual Educator/ KLAUS K. KLOSTERMAIER                         | 447 |
| The Devotional Music of Śrīla Prabhupāda/ GUY L. BECK                           | 459 |
| "Vedic" in the Terminology of Prabhupāda and His Followers<br>/ RAHUL PETER DAS | 473 |
| Bābā Premānanda Bhārati: A Comparative Study<br>/ GERALD T. CARNEY              | 493 |
| Has ISKCON Anything to Offer Christianity Theologically?<br>/ KENNETH ROSE      | 521 |
| ISKCON's Link to Sādhana-Bhakti/ SHUKAVAK DAS                                   | 535 |
| The Future of ISKCON/ E. BURKE ROCHFORD, JR.                                    | 559 |
| Contributors/   | 575 |

## PART I

### GAUDIYA VAISHNAVISM

#### INTRODUCTION

I was introduced to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in 1972. At that time I had been searching for religious “Truth” for several years and concluded that I was particularly interested in the East. All the major religions, I realized, came from that part of the world. Even the so-called Western religions—all originated east of my native Brooklyn, and then some. More, I wanted to know the *source* of religious truth. Islam, originating with Mohammed, was only 1,300 years old, and Christianity went back only to Christ. Judaism began around 4,500 years ago, with Abraham, and Buddhism is some 2,000 years after that, arising with the appearance of Siddhartha Gautama. But here’s something that really intrigued me: Hinduism’s origins simply can’t be traced to a particular point in time, nor does it have a “founder” in the sense that those other religions do.

I soon discovered that Hinduism is an umbrella term for numerous religious traditions, such as Shaktism, Shaivism, and, yes, Vaiṣṇavism. Since I was introduced to this latter tradition by one of its most accomplished and pure adherents, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, I became especially enamored with Vaiṣṇavism and its teachings. This fascination increased when I realized that Vaiṣṇavism was identified as Sanātana Dharma, or “the eternal function of the soul.” This was exactly what I was looking for. I wasn’t interested in one religion as opposed to another, or the sectarian form of belief that creates one-upmanship and war. Rather, I was looking for the essential thread that ties all religion together, the mystical truth that fosters love, compassion, and understanding. What I wanted was the science of God consciousness.

As I started to practice and study, I found that the origins and philosophical underpinnings of the tradition were a lot more complex than I had initially thought, and so I became involved in the academic study of religion in general and that of Vaiṣṇavism in particular. In due course, I published



a book of conversations with leading scholars in the field, *Vaiṣṇavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauḍīya Tradition* (New York: FOLK Books, 1992; reprint, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994). This book led to the creation of a scholarly journal, *The Journal of Vaishnava Studies* (JVS), which is now the leading academic resource for scholars of Vaishnavism around the world. Its articles are used in Hindu-related courses at universities as prestigious as Yale, Harvard, Cambridge, and Oxford, and they are cited by every major scholar in the field, both in their published works and as references for students to pursue higher studies.

Each issue is book-length and thematic, with scholars of Vaishnavism and Vaishnava scholars—tremendously gifted researchers, writers, linguists, philosophers, and historians—contributing regularly. Subjects covered range from goddesses in the Vaishnava tradition to famous temples from ancient times to the present; from Vedic texts, like the Upanishads, to the *Bhāgavad-gītā* and regional-language works of latter-day Vaishnavism; from biographical sketches of important sages to translations of short texts and explorations of mystical states.

Since my own particular interest is Gauḍīya Vaishnavism, even moreso than Vaishnavism in general, I have naturally, over the years, sought out Gauḍīya Vaishnava perspectives for JVS (with more enthusiasm, I admit, than those covering other forms of Vaishnavism). Whether our focus was on Rāmānuja's tradition, Mādhva's, the study of ethics in Vaishnava thinking, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, or what have you, I was always interested in finding scholars who would contribute articles from the Gauḍīya point of view. However, since these articles were printed alongside others (with the exception of Volume 5, Number 1, focusing on the Gauḍīya tradition), I thought it useful to create a single volume that includes the best of our Gauḍīya essays, along with a culminating section on the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), which is Gauḍīya Vaishnavism's most visible manifestation in the modern world. Most of these latter essays are taken from JVS, Volume 6, Number 2, which focused on ISKCON. Thus, the volume you now hold in your hands is the best of JVS, at least in relation to Chaitanya Mahāprabhu's brand of Vaishnava thought.

Part I will deal with Gauḍīya Vaishnavism as it is traditionally understood and Part II with ISKCON. The essays begin with my own overview of the Gauḍīya tradition, entitled, "The Meaning of Gauḍīya Vaishnavism," and is followed by **Norvin Hein**'s now classic article on Śrī Chaitanya and the theology of the holy name, so central to Vaishnava thought. After this, to bring

the point home, as it were, is **Acyutānanda Dāsa's** article on chanting as well. What Hein's article did for the academic community, Acyutānanda's did for the society of Gauḍīya devotees in the West.

From this we move to **Howard Resnick's** (**Hṛdayānanda Goswami's**) thorough look at the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which establishes Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, at least in terms of scriptural evidence. The other important Vaishnava scripture is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*), and **Barbara Holdrege** shows in her paper how highly regarded this text really is. She shows that, for Vaishnavas, this work is actually *śruti*—that is to say, it is hailed as being among the most sacred of revealed scriptures. This truth is brought further in the next paper, written by **Travis Chilcott**, who argues, on the basis of Krishnadāsa Kavirāja Goswami's *Śrī Caitanya-caṇṭāmyā*, one of the tradition's essential texts, that the *Bhāgavatam* is, indeed, the best of all scriptures.

A new direction is taken by **June McDaniel**, who shows convincing parallels between Gauḍīya Vaishnavism and Catholic mysticism, especially in relation to love poetry and enhanced states of spiritual ecstasy. The science of such ecstasy is then analytically broken down by **Neal Delmonico**, who looks at Rūpa Goswami's Bhakti-Rasa Theory, which is at the heart of the devotional process inaugurated by Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. The love and devotion that is analyzed in the Bhakti-Rasa theory is *experienced*, on a practical level, by the highest devotees of the Lord, most notably, the *gopīs*, the cowherd maidens of Vraja, whose very purpose for being is Krishna Himself. Their high level of devotion is studied in **Eric Huberman's** article and elaborated upon in the one that follows—**Graham Schweig's** analysis of the *Rāsa-līlā Pañcādhyāya*, or the five chapters of the *Bhāgavatam* dealing with the Round Dance of Śrī Krishna and the *gopīs*, in which transcendent love reaches its most intense manifestation.

To understand this love in a more intimate way, two articles look at the person who loves Krishna most: Śrī Rādhā. It is she who embodies spiritual devotion like no other. As Krishna's female half, she is God in softer form, as perfect devotee. **Ravindra Svarūpa Dāsa** offers a deeply philosophical look at Rādhā, along with her unique status as Krishna's supreme devotee and how this impacts on the life and identity of Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, who, according to Gauḍīya doctrine, is actually Rādhā and Krishna in one form. This is followed by **Donna Wulff's** in-depth treatment of Rādhā as she appears in the plays of Rūpa Goswami, revealing still more intimate sides of her personality. Finally, **Jason D. Fuller** brings us into the world of Bhakti-

vinode Ṭhākura, a great saint and intellectual of the nineteenth-century Gauḍīya tradition. Bhaktivinode's engagement of modernity and practical devotion inform all aspects of Vaishnavism in the contemporary world. The exploration of this personality and his teachings, of course, will act as a segue to Part II, which is about ISKCON.

As a side note, Gauḍīya Vaishnavas accept all genuinely spiritual revelation as true, especially those coming from the various Vaishnava lineages. This was the teaching of Bhaktivinode, mentioned above. In his classic work, *Śrī Navadvīpa-Dhāma-Mahatmya* (Chapter 16), he writes that Lord Chaitanya accepted two principles from each of the four *sampradāyas*, or lineages, and incorporated them into his own. From the Śrī-sampradāya, he embraced the concept of unalloyed devotion, that is, service to God that is free from unnecessary action (*karma*) and knowledge (*jñāna*); he also appreciated Rāmānuja's idea of service to devotees (*bhakta-jana-sevā*). From the Brahmā-sampradāya, Lord Chaitanya appreciated the complete defeat of Māyāvāda, or impersonalist, philosophy (*kevalā-advaita-nirāsana*) as well as worship of the deity of Krishna, understanding it to be eternal and nondifferent from the Lord in the spiritual world (*kṛṣṇa-mūrti-sevana*). The Rudra-sampradāya offered the world the conception of total dependence on Krishna (*tadīya-sarvasva-bhāva*) and the path of spontaneous devotional service (*rāga-mārga*), while the Kumāra-sampradāya advocated taking exclusive shelter of Rādhikā (*ekanta rādhikāśraya*), the female Absolute, and the exalted mood of the *gopīs'* love for Śrī Krishna (*gopī-bhāva*).

Thus, Gauḍīya Vaishnavism, according to Bhaktivinode, is like the cap on the Vaishnava tradition, including and encompassing the best of all that had come before. I initially sensed this as I became involved in the academic study of Vaishnavism, and perhaps it is why my appreciation for this esoteric spiritual tradition runs so deeply in my heart. Even though, following Bhaktivinode, I appreciate and encourage all genuine spiritual pursuits, and even though I especially revere all forms of Vaishnavism—from Rāmānuja's Śrīvaishnava tradition to its numerous latter-day derivatives—the Gauḍīya Vaishnava-sampradāya, for me, will always be front and center.

—Steven J. Rosen

**(Special note to readers:** Since the majority of these papers have appeared in prior issues of JVS, the formatting and style is inconsistent, with diacritics, phonetic spelling, bibliography, and so on, varying from article to article.)

## THE MEANING OF GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVISM: A THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

Steven J. Rosen

**T**he religious path known as Vaiṣṇavism can be described as devotion to Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Viṣṇu, or any of his divine incarnations. It is seen by its adherents as a type of monotheism in which worship of a personal God is the focus. In sheer numbers, it prevails as the leading religious system over Śaivism, Śāktism, and the many other paths commonly associated with Hindu *dharma*.<sup>1</sup>

There are ancient scriptural texts that form the basis of this religion: the Vedas, the Purāṇas, the Mahābhārata (including the *Bhagavad-gītā*), the Rāmāyaṇa, and the writings of the great *ācāryas*. Some of these texts date back to at least the second century B.C., with an oral tradition that goes back to antiquity. Vaiṣṇavism is known as *sanātana dharma*, or “the eternal function of the soul,” and it is also referred to as *bhakti-yoga*, or “the devotional path through which one can link with the supreme.” The religion of Vaiṣṇavism is expressed in various ways throughout the Indian subcontinent.

One such expression is Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. This is a form of the religion that began in sixteenth-century Bengal with the great *avatāra*/saint Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486-1533), but which participates in the much older form of the tradition. It is called *gauḍīya* because Śrī Caitanya proclaimed his mission in the region that was then known as Gauḍadeśa. This extended throughout the southern side of the Himalayan Mountains and the northern part of the Vindhya Hills, which is called Āryāvarta, or the land of the Āryans. This portion of India is divided into five parts or provinces: Sārasvata (Kashmir and the Punjab), Kānyakubja (Uttar Pradesh, including the modern city of Lucknow), Madhya-gauḍa (Madhya Pradesh), Maithila (Bihar and part of Bengal), and Utkala (a portion of Bengal and all of Orissa).<sup>2</sup>

The celebrated ancient capital of Gauḍadeśa, or Gauḍa, was situated in what is now the modern district of Maldah. The seat of the Sena dynasty, this capital was eventually transferred to the ninth or central island on the western side of the Ganges at Navadvīpa, which is now known as Māyāpura (although at that time it was called Gauḍapura).<sup>3</sup> Caitanya Mahāprabhu appeared in that area, and so Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism naturally took on that nomenclature to commemorate the event.

There are scholars, however, who argue that since the term “Gauḍīya” refers only to Bengal or Gauḍadeśa, it is inappropriate to use it as a name for the religious tradition itself. The ideological aspect of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, they say, extends beyond the designated parameters of Gauḍadeśa, and so they prefer to call the tradition “Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism” or “Caitanya-ite Vaiṣṇavism,” which is apparently more accurate in the sense that the religion is based on the inspiration and teaching of Śrī Caitanya—not on a geographical location.

Addressing this objection, there is a scholarly contingent who have pointed out that there is a material Gauḍa (the land in and around Bengal) and a spiritual one—Gauḍa maṇḍala—which is the “sacred space” of the same area. This conception is reinforced by the etymology of the word “Gauḍīya,” for the primary noun, *guḍa* (anglicized as *gur*), which literally refers to molasses, or sweetness, can be extended to the adjective *gauḍa*, the name of the country associated with Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. This is a grammatical, poetic, and even spiritual derivation, since Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is viewed by its practitioners as the culmination of a long spiritual evolution, like the proverbial icing on the cake. Adherents consider Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism the cap on the Vaiṣṇava tradition—it adds the necessary “sweetness” to an already delicious recipe. The secret ingredient, say the Gauḍīyas, is Śrī Rādhā, for it is her sweet devotion to Kṛṣṇa that embodies the essence of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Her *madhu-sneha*, or honey-like love, was not fully revealed before the time of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Rabindranath Tagore and others have written about the profusion with which sugarcane grows in Bengal, and that the sweetness of that region overflows into many aspects of everyday life, not least in the indigenous religion.<sup>4</sup> Writers such as Tagore are quick to point out that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, unlike other forms of Vaiṣṇavism, emphasizes *mādhurya*,<sup>5</sup> or the sweet love of God, as opposed to *aīśvarya*, or God’s majesty. Consequently, the title “Gauḍīya” has deeper implications than one might at first suspect. Ordinary or conventional understanding (*sāmānya*) of terms such as



Gauḍīya tells only one side of the story; but the tradition gives another perspective, one that is infused with a spiritual sensibility (*pāramārthika*).

A real Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, then, is not one who merely lives *in* Gauḍa but one who lives *for* gauḍa: a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava is one who lives for the sweetness associated with the love and worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. A Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava is one who is absorbed in Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and in Caitanya Mahāprabhu. This is eloquently expressed by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī in his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi-līlā, 1.19):

*ei tina ṭhākura gauḍīyāke kariyāchena ātmasāt  
e tinera caraṇa vandoñ, tīne mora nātha*

“The three deities of Vṛndāvana [Śrī-Śrī Rādhā-Madana-mohana, Śrī-Śrī Rādhā-Govinda, and Śrī-Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha] have absorbed the heart and soul of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas [followers of Śrī Caitanya]. I worship their lotus feet, for they are the lords of my heart.”<sup>6</sup> According to this verse, a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava is one who is *ātmasāt*—“surrendered to” or “absorbed in”—the three primary forms of Kṛṣṇa, which are now situated in Vraja and Jaipura.

Conceptually, these deities embody *sambandha*, *abhidheya*, and *prayojana*, which refer, respectively, to one’s relationship with the Lord, activities that enhance that relationship, and the perfection of that relationship. One who becomes absorbed in these activities is a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava.

The deity form of Madana-mohana was established by Sanātana Gosvāmī and he is thus the principal teacher of *sambandha-jñāna*; Rūpa Gosvāmī established the Govinda deity and so he is the *ācārya* of *abhidheya-jñāna*; Maṇḍu Paṇḍita established the worship of the Gopīnātha deity, but he shares his position as *prayojana ācārya* with Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, who is the teacher par excellence of the ultimate mystery: the sweet love of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas perceive the culminating objective of esoteric Vedic hymns—and of all religion—as devotional service to Kṛṣṇa as Madana-mohana, Govinda, and Gopīnātha. Madana-mohana is glorified as that feature of God that is so indescribably beautiful that he even charms Cupid, the god of love; Govinda is the Lord as the pleaser of the senses, and in this conception he even brings pleasure to the docile cows, who graze peacefully in his creation; and Gopīnātha gives insight into his internal *līlā* as the lord of the *gopīs*, the cowherd girls who are his greatest devotees.

According to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, these three conceptions of the deity help the spiritual aspirant progress from the material conception of life to the spiritual pursuit—and finally to the perfection of *rasa*, or one's relationship with God. This is the goal of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and its achievement coincides with the realization of Caitanya Mahāprabhu as the essence of these three deities combined. Mahāprabhu is seen as a saint, as an *avatāra*, and as the source of all *avatāras*. To Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, he is the combined essence of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Thus, his place in Vaiṣṇava history is unique.

This uniqueness has been noted by nonpractitioners as well, and while they do not often articulate the exact position of the Gauḍīyas, they do convey a sense of what Caitanya Mahāprabhu means for those who follow his path. For example, Christian theologian John Moffitt expressed his view of Śrī Caitanya in *Journey to Gorakhpur: An Encounter with Christ Beyond Christianity*:

If I were asked to choose one man in Indian religious history who best represents the pure spirit of devotional self-giving, I would choose the Vaishnavite saint Chaitanya, whose full name in religion was Krishna Chaitanya, or "Krishna Consciousness." Of all the saints in recorded history, East or West, he seems to me the supreme example of a soul carried away on a tide of ecstatic love of God. This extraordinary man, who belongs to the rich period beginning with the end of the fourteenth century, represents the culmination of the devotional schools that grew up around Krishna....

When he debated with philosophers, Chaitanya could be as scholarly as the great teachers, or acharyas, of old—Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva....In his teaching of the path of devotion to the general public, however, he continued to stress utter devotion to the Lord. This devotion was to be developed through hearing and singing the name and glories of Krishna, meditating on his form and attributes and his life on earth, worshipping him in his temples, resigning oneself to his will, trying to do only what would please him, serving his devotees, and showing kindness to all beings.

Chaitanya aroused in his followers a flood of passionate love of God. As a result, a wave of religious fervor swept over Bengal and Orissa. Yet despite the emotionalism his teachings brought

about, he himself was extremely strict. He closely watched the morals of those who were around him, sternly reproving any form of self-indulgence.... Though literally worshiped by thousands as Kṛṣṇa himself, he led a simple and even austere life.

Chaitanya delighted intensely in nature. It is said that, like St. Francis of Assisi, he had a miraculous power over wild beasts. His life in the holy town of Pūrī is the story of a man in a state of almost continuous spiritual intoxication. Illuminating discourses, deep contemplation, moods of loving communion with God, were daily occurrences.<sup>7</sup>

Śrī Caitanya, with his deep, emotional love for Kṛṣṇa, revitalized the Brahma-Mādhva sampradāya, the ancient Vaiṣṇava lineage with which he is traditionally aligned. He gave the sweet joy of love to a ready and waiting theistic tradition. This tradition was primed by the great *ācāryas*, who taught their followers to prepare the Lord's plate with awe and reverence, to add the spices of disciplined life, the herbs of scriptural knowledge, and the condiments of devotion. But Mahāprabhu's contribution was the sweet love of *mādhurya-rasa*. It is this that makes one a true *rasika bhakta*, a devotional connoisseur. And this brings us straight back to our gastronomic metaphor: the *guḍa* (*gur*) conception. When *gur* is moist and syrupy it is used like jam—spread on breads, confections, and cereals. The sweet nectar of Śrī Caitanya's love for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and the process he set in place for developing that love was spread on the Brahma-Mādhva line like the most tasty jam, giving the bread of Vaiṣṇavism a new flavor indeed. Through Śrī Caitanya, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism gave "heart" to a seemingly "heady" religious tradition. And it is the heart—more than any other part of the spiritual anatomy—to which Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism speaks.

But exactly how is Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism practiced? Singing and dancing and chanting the holy name (which will be explained in some depth later) is at the center of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava process, as is the tendency to engage in elaborately colorful festivals and feasts of all descriptions. Inner meditation, rosary-like chanting (focusing on the name of Kṛṣṇa) and various forms of asceticism—devotees are generally vegetarian and they avoid illicit sex, gambling and intoxication—are a part of their program as well. So the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava is an interesting blend of world-affirming and what may externally seem to be world-denying sensibilities; they have been called "the aesthetic ascetics" by one eloquent observer of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava

religion,<sup>8</sup> and this certainly seems an apt description of their particular approach to the religious life.

As in most spiritual traditions, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practice can basically be broken down into two fundamental approaches: awe and reverence for the deity and the mood of conjugal love. The various world religions have their own way of articulating this. When speaking of the approach to religion that focuses on awe and reverence, they refer to the “religious fear before the fascinating mystery” (*mysterium fascinans*), or sometimes they call it the “awe-inspiring mystery” (*mysterium tremendum*). On this path, practitioners tend to respond to the power of God and bow down to His “majesty” (*majestas*). They see “duty” (*pietas, religio*) and “obligation” (*obligare, debeo*) as prime spiritual objectives, and the mandate of scriptural injunction (*iubere, mandare*) as the central imperative (*imperare*) or motivating factor of their religious lives. In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, this form of religion is called Vaidhī-bhakti, the path of rules and regulations (*vidhis*), and it gradually develops in its adherents a type of divine love that culminates in the pure worship of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa or any of their many incarnations, or even Kṛṣṇa in a more majestic feature. The motivating factors here are *śāstra-śāsana* (“the dictates of the scriptures”) and awe and reverence. On this path one will follow the sixty-four limbs of *bhakti* and develop a rigid sense of right and wrong.

This approach is counterbalanced by a more inborn and all-consuming attachment to God, a sense of “being seized by God within” (*enthousiasmos*), a sense of “divine love” or “passion” (*agape, caritas*). This state of being is characterized by a deep “longing” (*pothos*) and a sense of holy “yearning” (*desiderium*) in which one constantly contemplates being “filled with the breath of the Divine” (*inspiro*). Unlike its majestic and lordly counterpart, there is a sort of “sweet” flavor to this love (*dulcem facere*) that makes it the desired goal of all religious connoisseurs and the preferred path for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. Those connoisseurs of religion who take this path seriously are called *rasika-bhaktas*, devotees who have a developed taste for the divine. Such devotees long to follow the example of the eternal Vraja associates of Kṛṣṇa in Goloka Vṛndāvana, the highest summit of the spiritual world, where majesty is eclipsed by sweetness and reverence is displaced by love. The path followed by these *rasika-bhaktas* is called Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana, which consists of a complex inner meditation on one’s relationship with God. Nonetheless, Rāgānugā devotees will observe all the rules of Vaidhī devotees and will externally appear as if there is no difference

between them. [Incidentally, “*vaidhī*” and “*rāgānugā*” are terms that are common only in the Gauḍīya sampradāya; however, although the terminology differs, the two concepts are known throughout the Vaiṣṇava world. The Vallabhites refer to *maryādā-bhakti* and *puṣṭi-mārg*, while in the Vaiṣṇavism of the south, Pīlḷai Lokācārya (among others, such as Maṇavālamā-muni) mentions *vidhiprāpta* and *rāgaṇprāpta* in the devotional context. All of these terms are interrelated.]

Since most practitioners are not in touch with their innate love for God, it is Vaidhī that is often recommended by spiritual adepts as a gradual process by which one can develop a taste for the spiritual pursuit and, ultimately, for divine love. Elements of Rāgānugā mysticism are judiciously revealed to novitiates only when they have the ability to receive them. This principle can be seen in various religions: in Judaism, for example, practitioners are told that they must study Torah for over forty years before they can enter into the esoterica and mysticism of Kabbalah. The Christian novices, too, spend years in study and practice before attempting to pursue higher mystical states. When they emerge from this “dark night of the soul,” they may, like St. John of the Cross or St. Teresa of Avila, become the “spouse of God” or the “bride of Christ.” Likewise, neophyte Vaiṣṇavas are often discouraged from delving too quickly into Jayadeva’s *Gīta-govinda* or the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* out of the fear that they may take the divine erotica found in those pages as something less than spiritual.

These are examples of forbidden fruit, so to speak. The neophyte spiritualist, in the beginning of his quest, needs to be protected by his or her teacher and by a sense of propriety, never tasting the most ripened fruits that exist at the top of the Vedic tree of knowledge. These fruits are carefully and gradually handed down to the student by the adept, all in good time, so that the disciple can have an opportunity to mature properly. Otherwise, even the well-meaning newcomer may try to prematurely enter the world of transcendent passion, a world for which he or she has not yet developed a proper taste. The danger, of course, is that such a student will misunderstand the entire spiritual reality of this realm, causing a mockery of the tradition and a ruination of his or her own spiritual life. This has happened among certain groups of Vaiṣṇavas in India, and consequently there are now various sects that inadvertently cheapen the depth and meaning of divine love as passed down by the great Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*. Needless to say, a good many of these sects are rejected by orthodox Vaiṣṇavas, and certain scholar/saints have written treatises warning practitioners about bogus



interpretations of Rāgānugā-bhakti; a good example of this cautionary literature is Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's *Prākṛta Rasa Śata Dūṣiṇī*.

The actual practice of genuine Rāgānugā-bhakti, however, is an important step for conditioned souls and is a starting point for those interested in advanced Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava spirituality. Many experts in the field of Vaiṣṇava bhakti have compared the path of Vaidhī to a young poet's study of grammar. Familiarity with grammar is absolutely essential for one who wants to learn the fundamentals of poetry and gradually develop the ability to write his or her own poems. When the young poet starts out, he or she studies the techniques of the masters, gets the feel of poetic verse, and learns the rules and parameters of proper procedure. All this is necessary to develop properly. The next step is comparable to Rāgānugā-bhakti. Once students are somewhat experienced and accomplished, they can write and recite their own poetry. At this point, they have developed a style of their own, following the standards of the great masters, of course. Such an adept need not consciously regard the rules and regulations of poetry, but will rarely transgress them. Such poetry will have a natural ease of its own and manifest as second nature for a developed poet.

This neat and compact analogy is not accepted by all. Most of the classical texts on the subject deny this sequential nature of Vaidhī and Rāgānugā, saying that they are two separate if also parallel paths. As evidence of this latter perspective, one can point to the fact that Rūpa Gosvāmī, one of the greatest authorities on the subject, deals with them as separate phenomena, addressing Vaidhī in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.6-269 and Rāgānugā in verses 270-309. Rūpa also claims that the two paths give rise to completely different emotions or *bhāvas* (1.3.7-14) and to totally divergent kinds of sacred love or *prema* (1.4.5-8) as well. The love that arises from Rāgānugā is termed by him *kevala* ("pure"), whereas the love that arises from Vaidhī he calls *mahimāyukta* ("mixed with a sense of awe").<sup>9</sup>

It should be reiterated here, then, and with added emphasis, that although Vaidhī and Rāgānugā are considered by many to be sequential, this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes, by following the rules and regulations of scripture under the guidance and expert counsel of a spiritual master, one will graduate to Rāgānugā-bhakti. But this will not necessarily happen automatically. Unless one is otherwise instructed by a pure *rasika-bhakta* or feels the natural yearning for God within his heart, one on the path of Vaidhī will usually continue on that path, reaching perfection in the mood of awe and reverence and going in the end to the *Vaikuṇṭha* planets where

Viṣṇu reigns supreme. For such a devotee, this *bhāva* will remain uninterrupted, particularly if it is due to a deep-rooted attachment to scriptural norms and conventionality—and especially if it is because of one's innate and eternal relationship with God.

Rāga, which is defined by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in its material sense as "an intense desire to enjoy" and in its spiritual sense as "an intense desire to serve," ultimately refers to deep attachment or even passionate attachment to the Lord. It comes of its own accord, rising in the heart as a result of *rasika* association or the rekindling of some spiritual memory. Rāga is the intense desire to follow in the footsteps of the Rāgātmika-bhaktas, the eternal associates of Kṛṣṇa in the spiritual kingdom, who have spontaneous love for him. While adherents of Vaidhī-bhakti tend to follow in the footsteps of strict *sādhakas* and go to Vaikuṇṭha, the followers of Rāgānugā-bhakti tend to tread the path of strict *rasika-sādhakas* and go to Kṛṣṇa's supreme abode, Goloka Vṇḍāvana.

Vaidhī and Rāgānugā, then, are different forms of the same thing: they are both forms of *sādhana*, or devotional service in practice, leading to the goal of love of God, albeit manifesting in different forms of that love. This stems from their initial, fundamental difference in genesis or motivation: the Vaidhī-bhakta, or the devotee following the principles of Vaidhī, is impelled by rules and obligations, whereas the Rāgānugā-bhakta, or the practitioner of the path of devotional passion, is driven by inner longing and love.

Both forms of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, however, coalesce in the practice of the holy name, and a survey of the meaning of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism would indeed be incomplete if it did not consider this most important of Gauḍīya practices. For thousands of years Vedic and Purāṇic texts have taught that sound holds the key to the mysteries of life, and to the creation and sustenance of the universe. At first, such bold claims about sound can be disconcerting—"What's in a name?" we often ask, trivializing the nature of that which is audible in favor of that which we see: "seeing is believing." Perhaps our minimization of sound stems partly from the fact that there is much we are physically unable to hear. As human beings we cannot perceive certain portions of the known vibratory spectrum, and of those sounds which are available to us, there is no assurance that we are hearing them properly. While we are extremely sensitive to sound waves of about 1,000 to 4,000 cycles per second (cps), we are all but deaf beyond 20,000 cycles per second. Dogs and cats, on the

other hand, can hear up to 60,000 cps, while mice, bats, whales, and dolphins can emit and receive sounds well over 100,000 cps. As Vaiṣṇava scriptures repeatedly remind us, then, our senses are imperfect and limited, and sounds, especially, exist in entire categories of perception that evade us on every level.

Indian tradition teaches that in ancient times there were warriors who knew the art of taking a blade of grass, or a combination of herbs, and, by chanting the appropriate *mantras* over it, changing this once harmless foliage into a weapon that could destroy entire armies. Often these *mantras* were used to help the masses overcome the miseries of material existence. In Jewish lore, Celtic tales, Egyptian legends and in other ancient cultures, too, we hear of mystics who, by pronouncing one sacred incantation or another, could cure sickness, change the shape of their bodies, perform miracles. Thus, chronicles from lands as diverse as India and Egypt tell us of a time when vibrations that lay at the foundation of our universe were harnessed by sages and spiritual adepts for the benefit of mankind. This ability, however, has largely been lost to us, and today its secrets are known to precious few *sādhus* who still practice the ancient ways.

The mystery of *mantras* and how they work is profound. Vaiṣṇava scriptures speak of Brahmā, the first created being, who, at the dawn of time, heard the divine sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute. In trying to express this magical sound, which Brahmā heard in the core of his heart, the sacred syllable "OM" came from his lips.<sup>10</sup> All mantras grow or expand from this original vibration, its potency directly related to the purity of its transmission. According to most religious traditions, the power of such sacred syllables—whether in Sanskrit, Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, or old Welsh—is unfathomable, for it puts us in direct contact with our divine source, penetrating the very fabric of the universe.

"Brahmā's soul," says the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (3.12.47), "was manifested as the touch alphabets, his body as the vowels, his senses as the sibilant alphabets, his strength as the intermediate alphabets and his sensual activities as the seven notes of music." This refers, chiefly, to *Devanāgarī*, "the language of the gods," a euphemism for Sanskrit, in which there are thirteen vowels and thirty-five consonants—all considered divine. These letters are known as the *mātrkā*, meaning "the matrix," or, further, "the source." Pāñcarātra literature extends this to the ultimate matrix, Lakṣmī, identifying spiritual sound in the form of Sanskrit letters (*śabdabrahman*) with the Lord's primary energy (*śakti*), the creative force of the universe.

Similar concepts regarding the sacredness of words, sounds, and alphabets are found throughout the world's great religious traditions. Consider Jewish Kabbalistic texts, for example, where it is said that God Himself is transcendent, but that a series of ten emanations of light (*sefirot*) issue forth from Him. Each emanation, say these texts, corresponds to the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet, giving the language a divine dimension. Ancient Sumerian texts, too, reveal the power of the Divine Word, stating that the world arises in conjunction with the direct utterance of a "primal being": objects spring into existence as He speaks their names, a concept that can also be found in the biblical story of creation.

Sound, then, is the essence of being. Vaiṣṇava scriptures, like the Bible, affirm that the entire cosmic creation began with sound—"in the beginning was the Word"—and that ultimate liberation comes from sound as well (*anāvṛttiḥ śabdāt*). This is confirmed in the *Vedānta-sūtras*. In a complex ontological analysis of reality, Indian texts assert that primordial sound—the Name of God—is the ultimate source of all manifestations, which, initially, refers to two broad categories: spiritual and material energy. Spiritual energy is constant and ever-expanding, while material energy goes through diverse transformations. First it transforms into "*mahat-tattva*," and then, progressively, into *ahankāra* ("false ego"), mind, intelligence, material sound, ether, touch, air, form, fire, taste, water, odor and, finally, earth (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 3.26.23-44). Here the term "*mahat-tattva*" refers to the manifest form of God's entire material energy, which was, originally, produced from *pradhāna*, the unmanifest, more subtle form of this same substance. The *mahat-tattva* gives rise to the "false ego," which is a form of material energy that covers conditioned souls who, in illusion (*māyā*), desire forgetfulness of their relationship with God. This false ego operates in three modes—goodness, passion, and ignorance—and thereby generates mind, intelligence, and "the basis of sound" (*śabda-tanmātra*), which is not a gross vibration but a subtle energy that generates the rest of material existence. This is a much abbreviated version of how ancient Indian scriptures claim the world came into being—in the beginning was the Spiritual Word, and the material energy of this Word evolved into everything that we see, taste, smell, feel, and hear.

And yet the Word remains distinct in Itself, a Person in His own right. Vaiṣṇava scriptures teach that this "Person" manifests on the tongues of those who understand the essence of religion. Concealed in the language of various scriptural traditions, the Word, or the Name—that spiritual

sound from which everything has originated—takes adherents back to their very own source. Thus, a cyclical process exists whereby one can take shelter of the Name, go through all of the material coverings—earth, water, fire, air, ether, sky, mind, intelligence, etc.—and enter a pure state of existence in the kingdom of God. Through an inverted process that corresponds to the way in which He created the world, He invites all souls to catch hold of that original spiritual sound to become free of material bondage: the same primordial vibration that creates the universe, when chanted under the direction of a bona-fide guru, can liberate one from matter into the realm of the spirit, taking its voteries from the darkness of ignorance and placing them in the light of reality.

Vaiṣṇava scriptures speak of men and women (of this world) as being in a conditioned, sleeping state. Interestingly, when one is asleep it is sound that has the ability to awaken. The visual sense will not suffice. You may try to awaken a sleeping friend by dressing yourself in “loud” colors, but your friend’s sleeping state will not end. The best way to awaken one who is sleeping is simply to call out his name. Similarly, Vaiṣṇavas say, by calling out the Name of God, which is the essence of all Vedic *mantras*, we can awaken ourselves from our materialistic slumber. The analogy may have some limitations, but the curious fact remains that all of the world’s major religious traditions concur that it is by chanting the Name of God that one attains enlightenment and freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

Mohammed counseled, “Glorify the Name of your Lord, the most high.” (*Koran* 87.2); Saint Paul said, “Everyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.” (*Romans* 10.13); Buddha declared, “All who sincerely call upon my name will come to me after death, and I will take them to paradise.” (*Vows of Amida Buddha* 18); King David preached, “From the rising of the sun to its setting, the Name of the Lord is to be praised.” (*Psalms* 113.3); and the Vaiṣṇava scriptures repeatedly assert: “Chant the Holy Name, chant the Holy Name, chant the Holy Name of the Lord. In this age of quarrel there is no other way, no other way, no other way to attain spiritual enlightenment.” (*Bṛhad-nārādīya Purāṇa* 3.8.126).

Praise of the Holy Name is found throughout the literature of the Vaiṣṇavas. From the *Bhagavad-gītā* to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to the poetry of the great *ācāryas*, the Holy Name is glorified as the best means for counteracting the pernicious effects of the age of Kali. Although there are literally hundreds of quotes affirming this conclusion, what follows are several that find a particularly important place among Gauḍīya theologians:



*aho bata śva-paco 'to garīyān  
yaj-jihvāgre vartate nāma tubhyam  
tepus tapas te juhuvuḥ sasnur āryā  
brahmānūcur nāma gṛṇanti ye te*

“Oh, how glorious are they whose tongues are chanting Your Holy Name! Even if originally a low-born dog-eater, such persons are to be considered worshipable. To have reached the point of chanting the Lord’s Name, they must have executed various austerities and Vedic sacrifices and achieved all the good qualities of true Āryans. If they are chanting Your Holy Name, then they must have bathed in all holy rivers, studied the Vedas and fulfilled all prescribed duties.” (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 3.33.7)

*satataṁ kīrtayanto mām  
yatantaś ca dṛḍha-vratāḥ  
namasyantaś ca mām bhaktiā  
nitya-yuktā upāsate*

“Always chanting My glories, endeavoring with great determination, bowing down before Me, these great souls always worship Me with devotion.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.14)

*golokera prema-dhana hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana  
rati nā janmilo kene tāy  
saṁsāra-biṣānale dibā-niśi hiyā jwale  
jurāite nā koinu upāy*

“The treasure of love of God has descended from Goloka Vṛndāvana in the form of those who are chanting Lord Hari’s Names (*saṅkīrtana*). Why am I not attracted to it? Day and night I burn from the poison of material existence, but still I refuse to take the antidote.” (Śrīla Narotama Dāsa Ṭhākura, *Prārthanā, Iṣṭa-deve Vijnāpti* 2)

*nāma cintāmaṇiḥ kṛṣṇaś, caitanya-rasa-vigrahaḥ/  
pūrṇaḥ śuddho nitya-mukto, 'bhinnatvān nāma-nāminoḥ*

"The Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa is the spiritually blissful giver of all benedictions, for it is Kṛṣṇa Himself, the reservoir of pleasure. Kṛṣṇa's Name is complete in itself, and it is the essential form of all spiritual relationships. It is not a material name under any condition, and it is no less powerful than Kṛṣṇa Himself. This Name is completely untinged by any aspect of material nature because it is identical with Kṛṣṇa." (*Padma Purāṇa* 3.21)

Of all forms of Vaiṣṇava religion, the Gauḍīya *saṁpradāya* stresses the chanting of the holy name as a primary practice for all who are serious about attaining the supreme goal of spiritual life. This is directly traceable to the manifest *līlā* of Caitanya Mahāprabhu as preserved in the many extant biographies focusing on his life as well as that of his immediate followers. All such documents consistently emphasize the Gauḍīya practice of taking the holy name of Kṛṣṇa and his incarnations as the prime benediction for modern man. It is the *yuga-dharma* which Lord Caitanya specifically came to distribute to all and sundry. In fact, it is easily the most central and defining practice in the whole of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teaching.

Jewish tradition teaches that a learned Gentile once approached the great Rabbi Hillel and asked if the rabbi could teach him all the truths of Judaism while standing on one foot. Prior to this, the same man had asked Hillel's colleague, Shammai, the same question, but Shammai had impatiently asked the man to go away, viewing his question as a mere disturbance. Hillel, however, was more accommodating, and when the question was asked, he said, "What is offensive to you, do not do to others. That is the core of Judaism. The rest is commentary. Now carry on your studies." Soon after, the man became a convert.

If one were to try to define Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism while standing on one foot, it would have to center on the chanting of Kṛṣṇa's name. In the first of the eight prayers traditionally ascribed to Śrī Caitanya, he states that the holy name is able to remove the dust from the mirror of the heart—to free its chanter from conditioning; it stops the blazing fire of material existence by spreading good fortune to all living entities; it is the essence of all education, expands one's bliss to previously unknown proportions, has a cooling effect on the consciousness, and enables practitioners to taste divine nectar. The remaining seven verses explain that all of Kṛṣṇa's energies exist in

his holy names, and that he has unlimited names in various languages. Śrī Caitanya describes the humility that is necessary to properly chant, as well as the single-minded devotion to the name that leads to pure and unmotivated devotional service. He then describes the symptoms of ecstasy that accompany pure chanting and the feelings of separation that inevitably result from such chanting. He describes the highest and most intense form of love, for God and for all living entities, and he describes this as the essence of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Anything beyond this, I'm sure Rabbi Hillel would agree, is all commentary.

### ENDNOTES

1. For evidence that Vaiṣṇavism constitutes the numerically largest segment of the Hindu population, refer to Klaus Klostermaier, "The Response of Modern Vaiṣṇavism," in Harold G. Coward, ed., *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 129.
2. See His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā*, volume 1 (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Chapter 1, Text 19, purport, p. 30.
3. Ibid.
4. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Collected Works of Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Social Associated, 1984), p. 74.
5. Ibid.
6. *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā*, Chapter 1, Text 19, *op. cit.*
7. John Moffit, *Journey to Gorakhpur: An Encounter with Christ Beyond Christianity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), pp. 129, 135-36.
8. See Steven J. Gelberg, "The Transcendental Imperative: The Case for 'Otherworldly' Religion," an unpublished paper presented at "Assembly of World Religions I: Recovering Our Classical Heritage." New Jersey, November 15-21, 1985, pp. 7-8.
9. See Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*. With the commentaries of Jīva Gosvāmin, Mukundadāsa Gosvāmin, and Viśvanātha Cakravartin. Edited with a Bengali translation by Haridāsa Dāsa (Navadvīpa: Haribol Kuṭīr, 1945).
10. See *Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā*, trans., Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1984), p. xi.

## CAITANYA'S ECSTASIES AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE NAME\*

Norvin J. Hein<sup>1</sup>

The man on whom this study focuses is usually called Caitanya, but that name has been shortened for convenience. His full monastic designation, conferred upon him by the guru who initiated him into the ascetic life, is Śrīkṛṣṇa-Caitanya, "He Who Has Consciousness of Kṛṣṇa." The complete name is worthy of notice because it points toward the most memorable characteristic of the man. Caitanya has a place in history because he was a visionary and a stimulator in others of similar sensitivity.

Caitanya set in motion the first powerful wave of Hindu resurgence of the sixteenth century. His style of worship spread far beyond the circle of his acknowledged disciples and has its echoes throughout the whole of Hindu theism. His direct tradition lives on in a vigorous Caitanyite sect that is actively missionary. Its meetings for emotional singing are held regularly today in about fifty centers in North America.

In addition to its significance in Indian cultural history, the religion of Caitanya has a typological importance. As we describe Caitanya's attitudes and practices, readers may recognize the characteristics of religious movements originating far from the banks of the Ganges. In Caitanya there may be a more thorough development of techniques and a more thoughtful theological explication of the basic experience than can be observed in other manifestations of this type of religion. India is nothing if

---

\*Editor's Note: This classic article originally appeared nearly twenty years ago in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 16-32. It is reproduced here in its entirety to commemorate the important role it played in opening up a generation of scholars to the importance of the Holy Name in Hindu tradition (particularly in Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism).

not systematic in the cultivation and analysis of the varieties of internal religious life.

We approach Caitanya as an exemplar of a type of religion, not as a problem in biography. We shall survey his life only selectively, for materials particularly relevant to the interpretation of his religious experience, limiting ourselves to non-controversial biographical data that need no documentation. We shall take the liberty, from time to time, of amplifying our picture with materials from the lives and writings of Caitanya's predecessors and successors when we believe that their outlook was homogeneous with his own. We are not attempting to describe the peculiarly personal religious life of Caitanya, but to delineate his faith as it was shared with, and interpreted by, his tradition.

## I

Caitanya was born in 1486 in a brahmin family in Bengal. For almost three hundred years Bengal had been under the firm control of Muslims. The aristocracy of the land were Muslims, and prestige and the power of decision lay with Muslims. To the lowest classes of old Bengal the coming of Islam may have been a liberation, but for those who were deeply committed to the Hindu tradition it was a disaster. The upper-class Hindu survived under Muslim rule by the Muslim's unsteady tolerance. So far as he was an idolator, the Hindu in Muslim eyes was a blasphemous person whose customs were rightly subject to stringent repression. The obvious way toward freedom and influence was through conversion to Islam or accommodation to Muslim ways. Those who remained Hindu suffered economic and political handicaps in obtaining the means of cultural self-expression. They were left with few of the freedoms that give meaning and satisfaction to life.

The Hindu establishment's first defense against Muslim pressure was a retreat into a tight orthodox pattern of living, under the direction of brahmin priests and scholars. Rituals were elaborated to signalize Hindus' complete loyalty to their indigenous tradition. Less respectable social groups, under the unhappy restraints of the time, found an undeniable remnant of satisfaction in religious exaggeration of sexuality. Caitanya, too, bore the special burdens of his people and period in addition to those common to all humanity; but he was to deal with them in a religious reaction of yet another kind.

Caitanya's childhood home was the town of Navadvīp, a center of the brahminism just mentioned. It was a university town if we use the phrase loosely: a complex of famous Sanskrit schools was located there. Students came from far and wide to study the scholastic traditions of Hinduism, and especially the relatively secular subjects of logic and grammar. Caitanya's mother was a daughter of a scholar of the place. Caitanya learned Sanskrit in childhood as a matter of course, and became accomplished in grammar especially. In his mid-teens he was already a bright young graduate of one of the Sanskrit schools. He founded a school of his own and joined the proud elite of the city.

As an established schoolmaster, Caitanya was pleased with himself and confident of his powers. He was a handsome fellow with an ideal complexion, shoulder-long hair, and a magnetic way. Ambitious and worldly, he had unashamed interest in getting fees. Along with the rest of the learned community, he was contemptuous of the "vulgar" *bhakti* religion followed by certain of the people of the area. Caitanya belonged to a Vaiṣṇava family, but he brushed aside the efforts of relatives to interest him in serious worship of Viṣṇu in any form. When Īśvara Purī, a monk who was a friend of the family, tried to involve him in a study of Vaiṣṇava scriptures, all Caitanya would do was to pick the passages apart from a literary point of view and ridicule the standard of their grammar.

Yet there was cause for seriousness in the family history of this supercilious young man. He was the ninth or tenth child of his parents, in a house made emptier and emptier by tragedies. The oldest children died in childhood, leaving only Caitanya, his parents, and his older brother. When Caitanya was in his early teens this elder brother abandoned the world as a *sannyāsi* and left home never to be seen again. Then Caitanya's father died. Shortly thereafter his first wife died a sudden accidental death.

As the only surviving son of his father, it fell to Caitanya to perform a traditional ritual for the peace of his father's soul: in 1508 he was sent to Gayā in Bihar to offer there the *śrāddha* on behalf of his father's spirit. In pursuit of that duty, and with its many sombre associations on his mind, it was necessary for him to enter a shrine displaying footprints in stone that were said to have been left by Viṣṇu when once upon a time he descended to earth to insure the preservation of man. The feet of Viṣṇu are therefore a symbol of the divine presence and help. They have a power of suggestion that a non-Hindu can scarcely imagine. And at that shrine at Gayā Caitanya chanced also to meet again the ascetic Īśvara Purī, who had re-

minded him once before of the claims of his Vaiṣṇava faith.

Just what happened then in Caitanya's inner self, he was never able to narrate in words. In later life the very mention of the word "Gayā" made him break into tears and lose all power of speech. But it was some kind of mystical vision that burst in upon his consciousness there for the first time. The inenarrable event shaped the remainder of his years, and gave a distinctive character to the lives of millions not yet born.

Īśvara Purī communicated to Caitanya a mantra that initiated him into the worship of Kṛṣṇa. He returned to Navadvīp another man. He would talk of nothing but Kṛṣṇa. He paid no attention to his dress and appearance. For his classes in Sanskrit grammar he had no taste now, and no time. His school dissolved. He ignored his scholarly friends, slept on the bare earth, hardly ate, spent his time laughing and weeping and shouting Kṛṣṇa's name. He saw visions of Kṛṣṇa in the clouds and ran after them with his eyes full of tears, crying "O God, do not hide your face from me!" Even his mother thought that he had gone mad.

In the town of Navadvīp there was a circle of Viṣṇu-devotees that was able to appreciate and accept such behavior. Its members were accustomed to assemble nightly in the courtyard of the house of a certain Śrīvās to sing songs in praise of Kṛṣṇa. The orthodox of Navadvīp spoke contemptuously of this group because of the non-intellectual nature of its activities. Even the general public looked down on its members because of the indiscriminate welcome that they gave to persons of mean social status. Caitanya joined them. His capacity for visions, his absolute conviction, his contagious enthusiasm and his talent in speech and song made Caitanya their leader at once. While people outside were still questioning his sanity, the devotees of this circle were beginning to say that he might be Kṛṣṇa himself returning to earth in a new body.

Here in these evening meetings Caitanya developed the methods of chanting and singing that have survived to this day, and cultivated publicly for the first time the possessed states that occur still among his followers and others whom he has influenced. The group's sessions of ecstatic singing—their only form of organized worship—followed the pattern of no established ritual and required the offices of no priest. The formalities of brahminism were ignored. The requirements of cultivating their distinctive kind of religious feeling shaped the pattern of their religious activities.

The kind of hymn that filled their evenings goes by the general name of

*kīrtan*. A *kīrtan* is a congregational song that magnifies a deity by mentioning his honorific names or praiseworthy deeds. Caitanya took the leadership in such singing in the Navadvīp meetings. He is believed by his followers to have been the creator of the several types of *kīrtan* that have come down to us from his time and circle. The singing of this group certainly attracted hearers through a fascinating novelty of some kind, but it appears that most of their characteristic types of song had an earlier history. The fresh element seems to have been the use of a special kind of melody, new or revived, that had an unusual appeal. Caitanya's personal contributions included a clear expressive voice of great charm, and, above all, a passionate acceptance of the message of the songs.

The biographers of Caitanya love to dwell on—even to exaggerate—the wild extravagance of Caitanya's behavior as the leading participant in these religious gatherings. The sessions always began with instrumental music of a distinctive character. Then Caitanya would lead off vocally, singing the names of Kṛṣṇa in a fine penetrating voice, uttering each name clearly and with an intensity of feeling that stirred an immediate response in the hearts of the devotees assembled around him. When the emotion in the crowd and in himself reached a certain tension, he would spring up from his seat, raise his arms high and wide and move about amidst the crowd, dancing and singing, shouting the words in ecstasy until perspiration ran down his face and the veins stood out on his brow. Cold thrills surged through his body, the hairs of his head bristled, he trembled and wept. Fits often came on him in which he would stiffen and fall. Then he would sometimes jump up and bound out of the throng and climb a nearby tree—or he would lie for a long time on the ground in a frothing fit, or in exhausted stupefaction, or in a trance. He came out of these lapses of consciousness reluctantly, as if torn away from happy visions.

Soon the fervor that was generated in Caitanya's circle flowed over. Forgetting their former taste for privacy, the devotees took their singing into the streets. A kind of singing procession now developed that is known as *nagarkīrtan*. For the rest of Caitanya's life the world was to know him as a center of commotion in public places, a leader of singing roaring crowds that were set afire by his love of Kṛṣṇa and by his sense of Kṛṣṇa's presence.

The religious tumults that Caitanya now stirred up in Navadvīp did not win immediate admiration from the brahmin scholars of the city. They complained to the Muslim governor of the place about the noise in the streets. The governor declared *nagarkīrtan* a public nuisance and issued an



ordinance forbidding any further processions of the kind. According to some of Caitanya's biographers, he responded with a modern tactic: he sent more than a dozen *nagarkīrtan* processions simultaneously through the streets to converge on the governor's palace, and besieged him with such powerful song that even his stout Muslim heart was overcome and he gave Caitanya's people liberty to sing in the streets at will. And that is what Caitanya did, essentially, all the rest of his life.

After a year or so as a lay devotee, Caitanya underwent the rite of *san-nyāsa*, gave up his childhood name of Viśvambhara Miśra, and assumed the monastic name by which he is now known. His formal renunciation of the world brought little change in his style of life; it merely symbolized his resolve to dedicate the whole of his time to the worship of Kṛṣṇa. Soon he settled permanently at the great Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage center at Purī on the seacoast of Orissa. Before the millions of pilgrims who came to Purī annually for the Jagannāth car festival, he cut a great figure as leader of the singers and dancers that performed in the processions of the chariots of the gods. He sent certain learned disciples to restore the holy settlements of Mathurā and Vṛndāban and to begin writing the manuals and theological works needed by his movement. His death, which occurred in 1533 at Purī, is the subject of conflicting stories: that he drowned by rushing into the sea in one of his ecstatic visions, or that he died of an infection in a foot that he had injured while dancing in a frenzy. In either case it was his capacity for boundless emotion that brought him death, as it had brought him life.

## II

With this simple sketch as biographical background, we can now center in upon our major interest: Caitanya's worship and its special theological supports.

Caitanya held back nothing from the fulfillment of the end of his existence as he understood it, and for him the sole purpose of life was the love and praise of Kṛṣṇa. In the little poem of eight Sanskrit verses called *Śikṣāṣṭakam* that is his only known writing, he expressed his characteristic dedication and his total longing for God:

When shall my eyes be filled with flooding tears,  
My mouth be choked with stammering praise,

The hairs of my body thrill with rapture  
At the uttering of Thy Name ?

Let Him crush me in embrace as his beloved  
Or by His absence strike me to the quick!  
Let the Libertine deal out whate'er He may,  
Still He only, no other, is Lord of My Life!<sup>2</sup>

Caitanya never actually repudiated the pious duties that occupy the time of many earnest Hindus. After his death, his learned disciples listed in their scholastic manuals as many as sixty-four devout practices as suitable for observance by members of the sect.<sup>3</sup> Caitanya himself participated only fitfully or casually in such rituals. He threw himself continually into only one defined practice—the worship described in the first verse above—the chanting of the Divine Name.

The early writers on Caitanya's life commonly use the word *saṁkīrtan* in referring to his activities in song. *Saṁkīrtan* or *kīrtan* is a general term for any singing of a god's praises that employs a certain old style of instrumental music and antiphonal exchanges between a chief singer and a chorus. Within this broad heading various sub-classes can be distinguished by names that refer to their content or setting. We have already noticed the word *nagarkīrtan* referring to processional singing in a city (*nagar*). *Līlākīrtan* describes performances that praise Kṛṣṇa by telling of his sportive deeds (*līlās*) in the words of old Vaiṣṇava narrative and lyric poems. *Nāmkīrtan* is the chanting of stanzas made up largely or entirely of divine names reiterated. *Nāmkīrtan* was Caitanya's characteristic religious practice.

The content and feeling of Caitanya's *nāmkīrtan* can be illustrated by quoting an example preserved by his earliest biographer.<sup>4</sup> We are told that Caitanya, from the time of his conversion onward, frequently sang the following and used it as a basis for sermonic exhortations:

*Harer nāma, Harer nāma, Harer nāmaiva kevalam!*  
*Kalau nāstyeva, nāstyeva, nāstyeva gatir anyathā!*

Hari's name! Hari's name! Just Hari's name alone!  
In the Kali Age there just is not, is not, is not any  
other way!

In *nāmkīrtan* such lines are repeated over and over, rhythmically, with intense feeling that begins with deep awareness of the meaning of the divine names that they contain. Another old *nāmkīrtan*, whose author is said to have been Caitanya himself, has the form of a Sanskrit prayer, as follows:

*Rāma Rāghava rakṣa mām*

*Kṛṣṇa Keśava trāhi mām!*

O Rāma the Rāghava protect me,

O Kṛṣṇa of the long locks, take me across!

The lines above are full sentences; but it is not necessary for *nāmkīrtan* to be grammatically complete or to have a rational meaning. The fact that the names refer to the Deity gives them significance enough. The texts of many *kīrtans* are no more than a series of names of Viṣṇu, repeated over and over in various orders. A very common *nāmkīrtan* contains no declarative statement whatever, but only names in the vocative case: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare!

In the singing of verses like these, each line, separately, is incanted by the leader first, and the whole assembly repeats each line after him, one by one. As the verse is gone through again and again, the leader steps up the tempo. When the speed of utterance approaches the utmost possible, the whole group, in unison, begins to shout the lines, at the same time beating out the rhythm with sharply-timed clapping of hands. The singers begin to sway and to let themselves go in ungoverned gestures. Faces flush. From the line of instrumental accompanists the bell-like peal of small brass cymbals swells up with the rising shouting and pierces through it. The whole process approaches a crashing, breath-taking crescendo. The point of explosion is reached: eyes flash, mouths drop open, a tremor runs through the entire assembly. The Power, the Presence, has been felt!

At such times, they say, Caitanya used to dance in ecstasy with all consciousness of his body gone.<sup>5</sup> His principal Bengali biography reports how he used to behave in Purī at the height of his participation in *nagarkīrtan* around the car of Jagannāth:

In the midst of the wild dance a strange delirium came upon the master. At the same moment all eight kinds of *sāttvik* emotion were

stirred up within him. His hair stood on end, with flesh and skin all bristling like a *śimul* tree full of thorns . . . From his whole body ran sweat mixed with blood, while with choked voice he stammered incoherently. His tears fell like water from a fountain...At one moment he seemed stupefied, the next he rolled on the ground; now his hands and feet were motionless like dried sticks, again he lay prone on the ground almost bereft of breath...At times water fell from his eyes and nose, and froth from his mouth.<sup>6</sup>

We have in literature an illuminating account of similar emotional phenomena that occurred at a *kīrtan* festival held under the patronage of the Rājā of Kheturi in the first decade of the 17th century. Of one of the participants named Narottama, we read that "mystic visions came to Narottama often during this concert of music, and he was so overpowered by them that at one time he swooned away. For some time the songs had to be stopped and all were busy trying to restore him to his senses, and when this was done, he looked divinely inspired as though just returned from the presence of God."<sup>7</sup> To express their appreciation of the meaning of such experiences some of the participants used the language of erotic love. A singer named Gokul Dās sang this verse:

O Lucky night that I spent,  
I beheld the moonlike face of my love!  
My youth, my life became blessed  
And everything around assumed an air of joy.  
My home has become a true home today,  
And my body a worthy one indeed.  
Providence has favored me tonight  
And all my doubts are removed.<sup>8</sup>

"Providence has favored me, I beheld the face of my Love, my doubts are removed"—these words bespeak a decisive divine self-disclosure. The poet means to say: God was present, I have met Him. My life has come to fruition; before I wondered, now I know.

*Kīrtan* is able to bring to many people an effective certitude regarding God's existence and power. Their faith arises with, and out of, certain extraordinary internal sensations and bodily phenomena. The tingling of the flesh that arises in the singer is understood to be no mere physical titillation but a response to a genuine dynamic Presence. He is sure that he

is indwelt by, and communes with, God himself. Caitanya believed that he had been blest by such realization, and his contemporaries affirmed his belief in the very name that they gave him.

Writers belonging to this bhakti tradition support their belief in the supernatural nature of *kīrtan* by asserting that miraculous benefits come from the practice. Unlike ordinary Hindu rites, the chanting of the Name does not depend for its effectiveness upon performance in any particular time or place or state of purity.<sup>9</sup> It causes power to flow in from an omnipotent source and sweep away forever old weaknesses, blemishes and oppressions. The Name confers unflinching love of Kṛṣṇa and turns one's entire life to devotion.<sup>10</sup> Writers cite the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to affirm the superiority of the cleansing power of the Name in comparison with the entire register of Hindu rituals of purification, which can indeed remove the consequence of individual offenses, but leave the root of sin untouched, whereas the Name removes the very source of pollution by regenerating the mind.<sup>11</sup> Hanumanprasad Poddar, modern writer and devotee, says that the temptations to evil living that once were all but irresistible become through this practice easy to withstand, and that the Name burns up old sins as fire consumes piled hay. The roaring sound of the Name goes out and purges away the sins of all who hear—even those of the birds and beasts. People who have transgressed all the laws of morality and religion can nevertheless obtain salvation through the uttering of Hari's Name.<sup>12</sup> It would seem that the Name can do whatever God himself can do! Advocates say that the religion of chanting the Name is now the world's only effective religion. In proof of their claim they quote *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 12.3.52:

What was obtained in the Kṛta Age by meditation on Viṣṇu,  
In the Tretā Age by sacrificing with oblations,  
In the Dvāpara Age by image worship,  
In the Kali Age comes by *kīrtan* of Hari.<sup>13</sup>

The position of the faith as the one universal religion for today is supported further by pointing out its universal accessibility, in that "everyone irrespective of caste, colour, creed, community, sex, age, space or time is allowed to enter or join."<sup>14</sup>

The followers of Caitanya are not awed even by the prestige of Śaṅkara's *advaita*. Quoting the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* they say that the bliss that comes of

chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa makes insignificant in comparison the bliss that the *jñānī* feels in experiencing the Undifferentiated *Brahman* and merging into it: the Name is a surging ocean of joy that makes the monists' *samādhi* look like the puddle of water that gathers in the hoofprint of a cow.<sup>15</sup> In India, that is strong language. It cannot mean less than this: that many who have followed this pathway of religion have undergone an experience in which their gravest anxieties dissolve. They attain a sense of purification, relief, victory and release. They have utmost confidence in the reality of the transformation they have undergone. For them, further search is needless—is out of the question!

The outsider's problem of understanding is not a difficulty in believing that the experiences described by the devotees actually occur. The accounts of the Hindu writers are consistent. The emotional phenomena described have been experienced in some degree by many non-Hindus, and many who have not known them personally, accept their actuality on the testimony of acquaintances whose veracity they trust. The uncanny moving power within is a ubiquitous factor in religious psychology. We have no reason to suppose that these particular reports are fictions. The difficulty lies, rather, in appreciating the expansive construction that is placed on these internal experiences. How is the *bhakta* able to be confident that these events are revelatory, ultimate in knowledge, saving, the very action of God?

The ability of a religious tradition to convince and reassure depends not only on its success in producing its characteristic experience, but also on its ability to surround the experience with effective theological explication. Ecstatic religious movements like that of Caitanya are often disappointingly inarticulate in their theology. But Hindus in general attach great importance to subjective states and give thoughtful attention to their analysis and interpretation. From ecstasies who are Hindu we dare therefore to expect explanatory ideas of some kind. In particular, a tradition as lasting as Caitanya's is likely to have had something beyond dogmatic identifications to offer the minds of its adherents. I am not aware that anyone has searched seriously, however, for Caitanyite theological teachings on *kīrtan*. The special undertaking of this study was to gather together any easily-available Vaiṣṇava doctrines that may have been intended to explain the experiences of these *kīrtan*-singers. The materials found are enough to justify a rudimentary account of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism's thinking about the Names of God. The Caitanyite theology of the Name is not elaborate. But

well-developed theories about this deep-felt matter of the names of God are not easy to find anywhere. In comparison with the reflections of other groups, the Caitanyites' theological effort in this connection may even be sophisticated. It is not the whole of Caitanyite theology, of course, any more than *kīrtan* is the whole of Caitanyite religious practice. The ecstatic trances of Caitanya himself were often precipitated by other means, especially by his contemplation of the forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as physical idols or as mental images. For the later Caitanyite movement also, the contemplation of the erotic sports of this Divine Pair has remained a vital second focus of meditation, vision, and theological interpretation. The singing of *kīrtan* is the more easily available and popular practice, however, and its conceptual framework is important.

The fundamental Vaiṣṇava idea about the Name is suggested in an often-quoted Sanskrit verse in which Kṛṣṇa promises that he will himself be present in the singing of *kīrtan*.

*Nāham vasāmi Vaikuṇṭhe  
na yogihṛdaye ravau.  
Madbhaktā yatra gāyanti  
tatra tiṣṭhāmi Nārada.*<sup>16</sup>

I dwell not in Vaikuṇṭha  
nor in the hearts of yogis, nor in the sun;  
Where my devotees are singing,  
there, O Nārada, stand I!

Now, "in the hearts of yogis" is exactly the place where many Hindus would deem God most likely to be present. Not so these bhaktas. Their method is not isolation, introspection, and arduous self-effort. Their trust is in the grace of God.<sup>17</sup> The background of their trust is two thousand years of Vaiṣṇava teaching about the willingness of God to intervene and assist man in the realization of his highest end. This confidence appears as early as the *Bhagavadgītā*, in which Kṛṣṇa says (4.7) that he descends to earth in age after age to destroy evil and establish true religion. In *Bhagavadgītā* 18:66 Kṛṣṇa promises salvation even to great sinners if they come to him in complete trust. The Vaiṣṇava God is a God who can be expected to be available to his worshippers' need.

How is God's presence in the circle of the singers actualized and certified? In the line of those Vaiṣṇavas who use the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, there is

a special understanding that the instrument through which the Divine Presence is mediated is the sung Name itself. The chanting of the names of God is a human activity, admittedly; but it is an occasion for a superhuman activity—the descent of God into the presence of His devotees. The voicing of a divine name brings realization of God's presence because a name of God is not just a sound, referring to a reality that is something other than itself. In the common fund of Hindu thought, a metaphysical status and function pertains to a thing's name. A name, in comparison with a thing's phenomenal aspect, is the principle of its individuality real or imagined—a subtler level of its reality and an approach to the essence of the thing named. In an advaita system that finally denies the truth of all individualizations, a divine name cannot express highest Divinity, or offer an approach to the Divine Being that is more than preliminary in function.<sup>18</sup> But for bhaktas like the Caitanyites and perhaps others,<sup>19</sup> who accept individualizations as real and acknowledge real personality in men and in God, a true name of God is a genuine modality of God's being or is God himself. That is why, in the reciting of sacred names, the mysterious Presence is often felt: God is there.

Even within the Caitanyite tradition, there is divergence in the way in which the relation between God and the Name is understood. Sometimes the divine names are described as outflows of the power of God. This seems to have been the view of Caitanya himself, as we see it in the second verse of his *Śikṣāṣṭakam*:

Thou possessest name upon name, in multitude.

In each of them is fixed Thy power entire,

Bound by no rule of time of recitation.<sup>20</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century the theologians of Caitanya's movement developed a stronger claim than this. They dared to say, not merely that the *Power* of God is present in such recitation, but that, when the Name is uttered in faith, God *Himself* is present. The Vṛndāban Gosvāmins call this belief the doctrine of *Nāmanāminoradvaita* or *Nāmanāminorabheda*, "the non-difference between the Named One and the Name."<sup>21</sup> Jīva Gosvāmin in his *Bhagavat-Saṁdarbhā* states the main point bluntly: *bhagavat-svarūpam eva nāma*, "The Name is the very essence of the Lord."<sup>22</sup>

The doctors of the sect warn, however, that one must not expect the Divine Presence to be realized through uttering any and every name of



God that human fancy can concoct. Names that are products of the imagination of man are insubstantial and of no effect. Jīva Gosvāmin says again in the book just mentioned, "...it is by the use of names that are celebrated in *scripture* that the Lord himself is instantly known...The inherent effectiveness of these must be recognized, and the fictitious nature of the others."<sup>23</sup> Modern Caitanyites stress the fact that *kīrtan*, as they practice it, uses no names save those that occur in sacred texts. As words of revelation, such names are transcendental (*apṛākṛta*) in nature, and utterly different from the merely aural names that are constantly being created by speculative minds. Scriptural names, when sung with faith, bring the full being and power of God into immediate presence.<sup>24</sup> They are the end, as well as the means, of the religious life.

This conception of the Name as a descending and saving agency is similar in some ways to the ancient Vaiṣṇava idea of an *avatāra*. The kinship of conceptions was recognized by the Caitanyite theologians. At several points in the evolution of their thought they considered including the Name under this old and honored heading. It was possible, first, to see the Name—a heavenly reality that has "descended" and assumed a form available to the senses—as itself a type of *avatāra*. Jīva Gosvāmin in one passage actualizes this possibility by remarking about the Name, "Speaking of *avatāras*, this is an *avatāra* of the Lord in the form of syllables: "*vaṇaṇārūpenāvatāro 'yam*."<sup>25</sup>

A second adaptation to incarnational thinking lay in the possibility of seeing the Name as the means whereby possessed individuals become *avatāras* "by adoption," so to speak. This type of reasoning took the form of an early effort to connect the Name with the sect's well-established *āveśa* class of *avatāra*. An *āveśāvatāra* is a Divine Incarnation Who is made such by the fact that the Lord enters into that individual and possesses him. The category covered a class of saints who were preeminent by reason of extraordinary charisma. The supernormal qualities of ecstatic devotees could easily be said to come about through the agency of the Name, and the view that Caitanya became an *āveśa* or "possessed" *avatāra* through his singing of *kīrtan* was plausible and had some explanatory value. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that Caitanya was called an *āveśāvatāra* at a very early time by his biographer Murāri Gupta.<sup>26</sup>

But in the end the concept of *avatāra* did not satisfy. An *avatāra* of any kind is not quite the full cosmic Being of God. An *āveśāvatāra* in particular is not the infinite Lord. Rūpa Gosvāmin says that *āveśāvatāras* arise when the Lord enters into and exalts particular souls, but they are *avatāras* by

analogy only, not equatable with real *avatāras* because they are limited in duration and limited in degree of immanence of the divine power.<sup>27</sup> Jīva Gosvāmin says in similar vein that *āveśāvatāras* possess a great portion of the divine energy but are never representative of the fullness of the Deity.<sup>28</sup>

The Bengal Vaiṣṇavas quickly dropped these early attempts to understand the Name as a *varṇāvatāra*, or as the source of *āveśāvatāras*. Apparently they could risk no impairment of their trust that the Name on the lips of devotees brings contact with Highest Godhead.<sup>29</sup> If an *āveśāvatāra* is not an eternal and full manifestation of the Deity, then the completeness and finality of any process that brings such *avatāras* into being is lost also. Perhaps it was for this reason that the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas rejected for their founder the label of *āveśāvatāra*, with its flaw of incompleteness, and identified Caitanya, as a matter of fact, with Kṛṣṇa Himself. With regard to the nature of the Name, no doctrine would do that claimed less than *bhagavat-svarūpam eva nāma*, "The Name is the very essence of the Lord." Once that truth is established beyond doubt, any believer who "knows the Name"—who hears and sings and feels it—is assured that he has arrived at Truth, the ultimate solution, the chief end of man. In singing the Name in the company of the saints, his doubts flee away, divine power rises up within him, the impossible becomes possible, the burden of the past is lifted from him, he has accomplished the purpose of his life, and he can look with composure upon death itself.

Because it is the Name that is to be known, the Bengal Vaiṣṇava's call to the religious life is not a call to the lonely hermitage, but an invitation to a community of song. The significance of such singing for believers oppressed by the frustrations of mortality is apparent in a *kīrtan* collected by Professor Bake, that was written as recently as 1943:

Dance, O Mind  
and spread your arms

and sing the name of God;  
sing Hari once.

The birds and beasts wake up and sing  
once ev'ry watch;

how then should you, created human,  
yet still remain unconscious? . . .

If you neglect the Name

stark danger looms  
when the great Crossing comes  
and you stand all alone.

Remember well the Name  
and dance and spread your arms!  
Sing Hari,  
Oh, sing Hari<sup>30</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. The author thanks the members of the American Academy of Religion who commented so helpfully on this paper, and is particularly grateful to Professor Joseph T. O'Connell of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, whose careful scrutiny of the document has tempered the interpretations at many points.

2. *Nayanam galadambudhārāyā*  
*Vadanam gadgadaruddhayā girā*  
*Pulakair nīcitam vapuḥ kadā*  
*Tava nāmagrahane bhaviṣyati?*  
*Āśliṣya vā pādaratām pīnaṣṭu mām*  
*Adarśanān marmahatām karotu vā.*  
*Yathātathā vā vidadhātu lampāṣṭu*  
*Matprāṇanāthas tu sa eva nā 'paraḥ!*

—Rūpa Gosvāmin, ed. Sushil Kumar De, *The Padyāvalī*  
(University of Dacca, 1934), No. 93 p. 39, and No. 337, p. 152.

3. Sixty-four types of *vaidhi bhakti* are mentioned in Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and are described in great detail in Gopāla Bhaṭṭa's *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. See S.K. De, *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta, General Printers and Publishers Limited, 1942), pp. 129, 340-395.

4. Murāri Gupta, *Śrīkṛṣṇacaitanyacaritāmṛta* 2.2.26 as quoted by Raghava Chaitanya Dās, *The Divine Name* (Bombay: the author, 1954), p. 380n., and often by others.

5. A.A. Bake, "Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu," Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, *Mededeelingen*, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 11, No. 8, pp. 279-305, reprinted by Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, Amsterdam, 1948, p. 9/287. Though the Caitanya sect worships Kṛṣṇa as God in his highest nature, notice that the names of Rāma are acceptable divine names, as referring to an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and thus to the same godhead. To magnify Rāma is not to lessen Kṛṣṇa but to recall the breadth of his protective operations. It is noteworthy that *mukti*, the most persistent longing of the Hindu soul, is also in evidence here. Though Caitanyite writers often belittle *mukti* as an object of aspiration, the singers here cry out, "*Trāhi mām*, take me over (this stream, *saṁsāra*, the world)." In Bengal, land of rivers, God is a ferryman and worshippers pray, "Take me to the Other Shore."

6. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* II.13, translated by Melville T. Kennedy in his *The Chaitanya Movement* (Calcutta, Association Press, 1925), p. 44.

7. D.C. Sen, *The Vaishnava Literature of Medieval Bengal* (University of Calcutta, 1917), p. 130.

8. Ibid.

9. Raghava Chaitanya Dās, *op. cit.*, p. 370, quoting Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, *Haribhaktivilāsa* 2.11.411, *na deśakālānīyamo na śaucāśaucanīyaya...*

10. Dās, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

11. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 6.2.7-12, vol. I, p. 716 in edition of V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu and Sons, Madras, 1937. On the power of the Name in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other writings, see also Adalbert Gail, *Bhakti in Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, Munchener Indologische Studien, Band 6, 1969), pp. 77f., 95f.

12. Hanumanprasād Poddar, *The Divine Name and its Practice* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, n.d.), pp. 7, 14, 84.

13. *Kṛte yad dhyāyato Viṣṇum, tretāyām yajato makhaiḥ/Dvāpare paricaryāyām, kalau taddhari-kīrtanāt.*

14. Bhakti Pradīp Tirtha, *Sayings of Vaishnava Saints* (Puri: A.R. Patnaik, 1949), p. 11.

15. Raghava Chaitanya Dās, *op. cit.*, p. 218 (quoting Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Cc.*, 7.96-98.)

16. Quoted in Bake, *op. cit.*, p. 7/285.

17. Another striking expression of this Caitanyite depreciation of yoga is found in Priyā Dās' commentary on Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* (Bombay, Śrīveṅkatesvara Steam Press, *saṁvat* 1888), p. 238:

*Prem bhakti ekau palak, koṭi varaṣko yog*  
*Prem bhakti sab yog hai, yog prem bina rog!*  
 "Loving devotion for one moment  
 equals yoga for ten million years  
 Loving devotion's the whole of yoga,  
 yoga without love's a disease!"

18. For *advaita* views of *nāma* see *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6:1.4-6, 6:4.1-4, and S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy I* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.), 1923ff, p. 188n.

19. See W.H. McLeod, *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 189-196.

20. *Nāmanāmakāri bahudā nijasarvaśaktis*  
*Tatrārpiṭā nīyamitaḥ smarane na kālaḥ.*

—Rūpa Gosvāmin, ed., Sushil Kumar De, *op. cit.*, No. 31, p. 13.

21. S.K. De, "Philosophy of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism," in *Bengal's Contribution to Sanskrit Literature and Studies in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1960), p. 120.

22. Quoted by De, *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers, 1942), p. 219, n. 9.

23. *Ata yaṭi śāstre'ti-prasiddhair nāmabhiḥ śrī-bhagavān eva jaṭiti pratīto bhavati...teṣāṁ svataḥ-siddhatvam anyeṣāṁ kalpanāmayatvaṁ jñeyam.* (Quoted in De, *Vaiṣṇava Faith*, p. 220).

24. Nisikanta Sannyal, *Sree Krishna Chaitanya*, (Madras: Gaudiya Math, 1933), pp. 576, 601f.

25. *Avatārāntaravat parameśvarasya varṇarūpenāvatāro'yaṁ*, quoted by De, *Vaiṣṇava Faith*, p. 220.

26. De, *Vaiṣṇava Faith*, pp. 338, 175.

27. De, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

28. De, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

29. For an emphatic modern defense of the unqualified divinity of the Name see Raghava Chaitanya Dās, *op. cit.*, pp. 582-592; also Sannyal, *op. cit.*, pp. 638-40.

30. Bake, *op. cit.*, p. 7f.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bake, Arnold A., "Kirtan in Bengal," *Indian Art and Letters*, n.s. XXI (1947), pp. 34-40.
- "Śrī Chaitanya Mahaprabhu," *Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 11, No. 8, pp. 279-305. Reprinted by Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, Amsterdam, 1948.
- Chakravarti, Sudhindra Chandra, *Philosophical Foundations of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism* (Calcutta: Academic Publishers, 1969).
- Chakravarti Sukumāra, *Caitanya et sa theorie de l'amour divin—prema* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1933).
- Datta, Phulrenu, *La Societe' Bengalie au XVIe siecle* (Paris, Editions Litteraires de France, 1938).
- De, Sushil Kumar, *Bengal's Contribution to Sanskrit Literature and Studies in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism* (Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1960).
- Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta, General Printers and Publishers Limited, 1942).
- Dimock, Edward C., Jr., "Doctrine and Practice among the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal," *History of Religions III* (Summer 1963), pp. 106-127.
- "The Place of Gauracandrikā in Bengali Vaiṣṇava Lyrics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society LXXVIII* (July-Sept. 1958), pp. 153-169.
- Eidlitz, Walther, *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya, sein Leben und seine Lehre* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1968, Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion No. 7).

Gonda, Jan, *Notes on Names and the Name of God in Ancient India*.

Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishers (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 75, No. 4), 1970.

Judah, J. Stillson, *Hare Krishna and the Counterculture* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974).

Kennedy, Melville T., *The Chaitanya Movement* (Calcutta: Association Press, 1925).

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, Eng. tr., Nagendra Kumar Ray, *Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*, 3 vols. in 6 (Calcutta: Nagendra Kumar Ray, 1954ff.).

Law, Narendra Nath, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Caitanya* (London: Luzac & Co., 1949). Reprinted from *Indian Historical Quarterly* XXIII (Dec. 1947) pp. 261-299, and XXIV (March 1948), pp. 19-66.

Poddar, Hanumanprasad, *The Divine Name and Its Practice* (Gorakhpur, Gita Press, n.d.).

Raghava Chaitanya Dās, *The Divine Name* (Bombay, the author, 1954).

Rūpa Gosvāmin, ed., Sushil Kumar De, *The Padyāvalī* (University of Dacca, 1934).

Sen, Dineschandra, *The Vaiṣṇava Literature of Mediaeval Bengal* (University of Calcutta, 1917).

## THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY NAME: A GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVA PERSPECTIVE

By Acyutānanda Dāsa

**H**is Holiness B.R. Śrīdhara Mahārāja sat on the roof of his quarters in Navadvīpa (West Bengal). The now very old *sādhu* was in a contemplative mood, and to approach him in this state disturbed me. He motioned that I should sit in front of him, so I timidly went and sat down on a grass mat at his feet. There was no one to be seen for miles around. "There are many things to see from up here by which we can remember Śrī Caitanya," His Holiness said. "We have this Ganges, this forest, the temples, His favorite tree, banana. What have you come here to ask me?"

"Can you explain how, if the Name is a spiritual thing—how is it that we are all chanting it with a material tongue?" I asked, feeling quite foolish. After some silence he began to speak, "Nītāi Caitanya, Nītāi Caitanya," and then he proceeded:

"It cannot be uttered by a material tongue, nor can a material ear hear the Name. He [the Name] is *adhokṣaja*, [beyond experimental knowledge], having reserved the right of not being exposed to organic senses. All the experience, knowledge and memories that we have are gleaned with the help of mundane sense perception. Our tongue is comprised mostly of earth and water elements; the nerve endings extending to all parts of the body carry charges of electricity, also a material element. If an object is too far away, it is not touchable, seeable, tastable, etc.; if an object is too close, it is also imperceptible; we can't see our own *tilaka* mark or even our own eyelids.

"When the senses are extended by microscopes and telescopes, these instruments have more range, but are still limited to the material sphere. The telescope cannot penetrate the outermost covering of the

universe; the microscope lens is composed of atoms and therefore cannot see the atom or anything smaller than the atom. Likewise, the system of mental speculation is also inefficient to perceive the spiritual element. Mind is a material element whose density is very slight. (*Bhagavad-gītā*, VII:4) Higher abstractions are no more spiritual than hard rocks. There is a common belief that by extending the potency of the mind we can conceive of the infinite, but this process is defective. If the infinite can be confined in a limited mind, then it is not infinite. I don't even know how many hairs are on my own head. Mental speculators grind their brains over abstract aphorisms of Zen and *Upaniṣads* and think that by their own power they can achieve something like infinity. The result is mental masturbation. The mind explodes and dies of exhaustion. And the reaction is deplorable: total forgetfulness of the self and the infinite.

"There are channels by which the infinite descends. He is all power, glory, beauty, knowledge, wealth and renunciation. He is dominant, all-extending, free, and autocratic. The infinite cannot be contained in a limited sphere, as I've just said, but if He is really infinite then He has the power of making Himself known in all His fullness to the finite mind. When, out of His own prerogative, He takes the initiative and reveals Himself to the devotee, there is actual perception of Godhead, self realization, transcendental revelation. By the channel of transcendental sound He comes, by vibrating the spiritual tongue of the pure devotees representing Him to the world. The spiritual element vibrates the spiritual tongues of the perfect devotee's audience, which have hitherto never been vibrated.

"The pure devotee utters the Name of God. Our material ears hear some sound that resembles the transcendental Name of Kṛṣṇa; our eardrum moves the liquid of the inner ear, half water and half air, which vibrates the ethereal element and touches our mind. At this point, soul has still been untouched, and there has been no genuine spiritual experience. By hearing with the mind's impressions, we enjoy the sound of the cymbals, the beat of the chant, the pleasant company and effect of listening and hearing. But it doesn't stop here. Piercing the mind, the original sound uttered by gurudeva moves our intellect, and we consider philosophical and metaphysical truths. For millions of years, sages chanted this on the banks of many holy rivers. Ideas flood everywhere about the possible effects of the *mantra*. This, while being quite blissful, is not spiritual revelation in the true sense. Beyond the



intelligence is the spiritual element—soul, myself. That sound, having cut through all my senses including the mind and intellect, now vibrates the finest sentiments of my own real existence. This is the perception of the holy Name on the spiritual plane with my spiritual ear. Then, the soul inspired, recapitulates, sending vibration back into the intelligence, mind, and so on—the whole process inverted—out to my external tongue and we say, ‘Hare Kṛṣṇa.’ That Hare Kṛṣṇa is He. And we dance in ecstasy.

“Sounds, sounds, sounds,” His Holiness repeated slowly. “Sounds. Catch hold of the sounds. Seize the sound waves traveling within the ether, and your happiness in spiritual life is assured. One sage has expained in his *sūtra* that massive epidemics are due to contamination of the ether by impure sound. When the lawyers and pleaders in court begin to tell lies in the name of justice, these sound vibrations contaminate the ether, which in turn contaminates the air and water which people breathe and drink, and epidemic is the result.

“When four-headed Brahmā creates the universe, the seed ingredient is sound, ‘OM.’ And from that ‘om’ the *Gāyatrī mantra* is born: In this sound, the fourteen planetary galaxies sprout like whorls of spiraling stars and planets, with the sun situated in the very center of the universe. Each planetary system is composed of a different sound uttered by Lord Brahmā. Each galaxy provides the infinite *jīvas* with their particular spheres of *karma* (action), *dharma* (religion), *artha* (economic development), *kāma* (sensual enjoyment and its resultant suffering), and *mokṣa* (facility of liberation). It is the function of Brahmā to provide these different galaxies and planets according to the sinful and meritorious deeds of the innumerable. Lord Brahmā utters a different sound for each planetary system and his engineer, Śrī Viśvakarma, creates the planets according to those sounds. The subtle elements and gross elements are distributed in this way. In our planet, the predominating elements are earth and water. In other worlds, only water is found. On the sun, fire is the prominent element. If a spiritual individual, under the effects of illusion, or *māyā*, wishes to end his gross existence, he may enter a planet of air, ether, mind or intelligence and live as a ghost.

“The individual *jīva* is also endowed with a particle of creative power. And the ordinary individual as well creates his tiny sphere of influence by sound. Some *jīvas*’ spheres of influence are no bigger than their own craniums, and some *jīvas* have influence over a community, a nation, or even a whole planet. The beauty and harmony of their particular spheres

of influence depends on the quality of sounds they produce.

“When one nation tries to conquer another, the first points to capture are the radio stations, the newspapers, the journals—the lines of communication. By sending out its manifesto by sound, the government can move the former leaders from their posts and capture the country. Then, also by sound, the new government becomes established. If there should be any defect in that sound, then the whole thing is ruined. That is why there is so much alteration in the world situation. The sound of all these *jīvas* is, to quote the Bible, ‘Babel.’ Nonsensical sounds are entering and contaminating the ether, the air, the water, and the very molecular structure of each and every person, place and thing.

“A person’s mind is composed of two functions, technically termed *saṅkalpa* and *vikalpa*. *Saṅkalpa* refers to the mind’s desire to join thoughts into concepts, theories and tableaux of theories. *Vikalpa* is the mind’s function of rejecting thoughts, simplifying and limiting experiences which are gathered through the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Both functions are controlled by sound. Here is an experiment: Close your eyes. When I repeat a number, you will see the number flash before your mind like a cash register. One... Three... Seven... Four... The processes of *saṅkalpa* and *vikalpa* respectively make the thoughts come and go. This is a very simple form of the mind’s process. On a more complicated scale, there is the very risky business of intentionally invading the sound waves with defective sound. The lines of communication are filled with impure sound from the earliest of schoolbooks to the most advanced so-called philosophy. The White House filibusters are another excellent example of intentional pollution of sound channels. If we were to infuse spiritual sound into the ether, if we were to saturate the ether with the transcendental sound vibration of Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, this *mahā-mantra* would purify, enlighten and saturate every being with its potencies.

“In Śrī Caitanya’s eight verses, which comprise the final message of all spiritual instructions, the first verse gives five effects of the transcendental sound of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* as follows: *Ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam*. It wipes the material dust from the mirror of the mind. The mind is like the intermediate connecting medium between the spirit and that material external covering called the body. The soul has no material activity. When covered by *māyā*, or illusion, the soul remains dormant in a state of suspended animation. The magnitude of the soul

is so great, however, that it infuses consciousness on all sides. Through the medium of the mind, the senses act and we 'know' things. If this 'glass,' the mind, is put out of focus by the external nature, we suffer confusion, pain, disease, and death. Yes, death is a state of mind only, as the soul has no death. By the mind we mistakenly think 'O! I'm dying!' 'I'm drowning!' 'I'm giving birth!' 'I'm sick!' etc. When the mind is cleansed by the *mahā-mantra*, the mind is forcibly purified. All the material concoctions, which are the cause of our suffering, are forcibly murdered, starved to death. They thrive on material sense pleasures. Flooding the mind with transcendental sound is just like stepping on the pin of a bomb: All those misconceptions of material suffering and enjoyment are shattered, murdered, and the material mind is conquered wholly, leaving no enemies behind. The mind then reflects the spiritual knowledge, quality and energy of the soul itself.

"*Bhava-mahā-dāvāgni-nirvāpaṇam*. The fire of conditional life is thus extinguished. *Nirvāṇa*, which most people are trying to understand from Buddhist texts, means extinguishing the fire of material existence. This body has been burning from the very beginning of its duration by the process of digestion. Biologists all declare that the body is a burning organism, giving off heat, water vapor and carbon dioxide. After seventy or more years, our body is consumed by that smouldering digestive fire, and we move into another body, only to burn up that one too. It is like chain smoking; with the lit end of the cigarette you light up a fresh cigarette, and on and on. By the potency of the transcendental sound, the cause of that fire is extinguished.

"*Śreyaḥ-kairava-candrikāvitaraṇam vidyāvadhūjīvanam*. The transcendental sound then spreads the light of benedictions, peaceful suggestions and fearlessness, and no more anxieties invade the mind. We approach the world after coming out of the womb with many deep-rooted fears: Is there safety? Is there happiness? Is there peace? The answer is the basic seed. *Om* in this sense means one big spiritual yes. *Om*, yes—a positive answer. Simply by negating the mind, the questions of the soul are not satisfied; something positive must be given. The *mahā-mantra* floods the mind with affirmative suggestions of the truth.

"*Ānandāmbudhi-varḍhanam pratipadam pūrṇāmyrtāsvādanam*. A full draught of an ocean of blissful nectar is served to the soul, who has been thirsty from time immemorial.

"*Sarvātma-snapanam param, vijayate śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtanam*. This point

has a twofold meaning, one external and one internal. *Sarvātman* means 'all souls.' The holy Name bathes all souls with spiritual bliss, knowledge and love. The transcendental sound completely overcomes the soul with His sublime potencies. But *ātman* has many meanings, as given by Caitanya Mahāprabhu. *Ātman* means the supreme absolute truth, the body, the mind, the intelligence, endeavor, conviction and nature. By uttering the pure sound of the *mahā-mantra* one invades the very cause of everything that exists. The mind, body and soul, and even nature itself can be changed into transcendental nature by one heart-felt exclamation of 'Hare Kṛṣṇa.' Capture the sound waves which are the cause of every item of existence and saturate them with the holy Name. The result will be the total transformation of energy. An *āśrama*, temple, and all the paraphernalia in them, are all divine. The environment in which we live in the *āśrama* is not the same as the one in which we were born. It is 'there,' it is Goloka, and the more we progress in our *sādhana* the more He will reveal Himself to us.

These truths about the descent of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* were alluded to by Jayadeva Gosvāmī, *jagat-guru*, who has written a beautiful verse in description of this process: 'O Hari Nāma, You enter my ear and touch my heart, and tears flow from my eyes and fall to the ground; making soft clay, my footprints are left for my successors to follow my way.'

"It must be noted that if the teacher is bogus, then that Name will not touch the spiritual spark within the coverings of mind and body. It may sound the same, but it is not—just as milk and whitewash look the same, but they are altogether different.

"Now many such artificial *gurus* are about, and this fact is, as it were, camouflaging the genuine devotees. If someone finds a treasure beneath a tree and marks the tree with his initials and then comes back to find every tree marked with the same initials, he is unable to recall the original tree. This is now often the case, since false holy men are running rampant. But if one is fortunate enough to know the scriptures and tradition, and if one is truly sincere, he will find a genuine *sādhū*, hear the Name, and begin authentic spiritual life. Then he or she will find a great gift indeed.

"The original sentiments invoked by the Name are concentrated, blissful recollections of the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa as performed in the spiritual world. These sentiments are in all souls and are five in number: the neutral sentiment, the serving sentiment, the sentiment of friendship,

parental sentiment, and the sentiment of intimate love. Kṛṣṇa is called *akhila-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, the ocean of all transcendental sentiment. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa says, *ye yathā mām prapadyante, tāms tathaiva bhajāmya-ham*: 'I reciprocate all the different services rendered to Me within the sphere of these different sentiments, or *rasas*.' While all of these relationships or spiritual sentiments are on the self-same absolute platform, one may simultaneously acknowledge certain distinctions within them.

"For example, Kṛṣṇa exchanges loving sentiments with the neutral devotees, who do not take active engagement in His interest, at His own sweet time and liking. If He wants to play the flute He picks it up, and He sets it down when He likes. To His servants, He is the noble master. In this relationship there is more facility to please the Lord, to bring His food, His favorite clothing. Yet there is still some hindrance, since He may tell the servant to be gone, and the servant must obey out of duty. The friendship *rasa* has two stages. The first stage is friendship with feeling of respect and reverence. Arjuna has this type of friendly relationship with Kṛṣṇa. He begs forgiveness from Kṛṣṇa for unknowingly calling Him in jest or for associating with Him without bowing down, etc.

"When friendship with Kṛṣṇa is more developed, the respect and honorable formalities disappear. Jumping on Kṛṣṇa's shoulders, wrestling and playing as though Kṛṣṇa were their equal, Sudāmā, Śrīdāmā and the other cowherd boys revel in endless sports. Sometimes they even consider Kṛṣṇa their inferior: 'Oh, Kṛṣṇa, He's the youngest one of us. He's also the lightest. We can all overcome Him in wrestling, so go lightly with Him.' As sugar cane juice is concentrated into molasses and then into crystal, so also the friendly *rasa*, with added feelings, develops into parental affection. 'Kṛṣṇa is my son,' says Mother Yaśodā. 'I must always look after His needs and protection. If I don't see Him for even five minutes I get so scared. I see huge trees falling on Him and horrible demons capturing Him. Oh, there You are! Why do You scare Your mother like that? Always stay in my presence; I can't stand to have You out of sight.' Even punishment of the beloved is seen in this intimate relationship.

"As concentrated sugar becomes rock candy, so the parental exchange of *rasas* condenses into conjugal love, in which there is complete dedication to the desires of Kṛṣṇa, with no tinge of desire for one's own pleasure. 'I am Yours'—complete, unconditional surrender. 'If you trample

my body underfoot or embrace me too tightly, for Your pleasure I am happy. If You want to throw me into hell and keep me far from Your company, I am prepared to go. If You forget me, that's okay, but I cannot forget You. You are always my beloved.”

By this time His Holiness had become exhausted. After forty years of lecturing previous to the use of microphones, his voice had become very thin. We were only one inch apart, face to face. He sat there with his eyes closed, and it was clear that he was experiencing those things of which he spoke.

Just then the loud gong began to toll in crescendo, reaching four loud blasts and reverberating into silence.

“Go down now. It's time for *ārātika*. Could you follow my words?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Did you like it?”

“Yes.”

“That's all right. Go down now.”

## KṚṢṆA IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ: A BEGINNING ONTOLOGY FROM THE GAUḌĪYA PERSPECTIVE\*

Howard J. Resnick (H.D. Goswami)

### Introduction

I attempt in this paper to clarify certain essential teachings of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, primarily those focusing on a single point: the nature and status of Kṛṣṇa, God, according to the *Gītā* itself. My strong conviction is that the *Gītā* is a lucid, self-explanatory work, and therefore the occasional practice of commentators to force on it extraneous doctrines often renders the text obscure where it is bright, esoteric where it is literal, and impersonal where it is intensely personal. I am operating here on an ancient principle which holds that certain Vedic<sup>1</sup> texts are *svataḥ-prāmāṇyam*, literally “evident in or by themselves.” As stated in the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa*, “The *Rg Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, *Mahābhārata*, *Pāñcarātra*, and original *Rāmāyaṇa* are all considered by authorities to be Veda. The knowers also know that those Purāṇas dedicated to Lord Viṣṇu enjoy the same status. These literatures are self-evident, and there is nothing at all to speculate about them.”<sup>2</sup>

I should note at once that this principle does not do away with intellectual response to the scriptures. Rather it is a call for sober practices for understanding, in which we first struggle to comprehend a scriptural message on its own terms, through careful study of its internal structures of meaning.

We get some historical flavor of this methodology by turning to a fascinating theological debate that took place almost five hundred years ago in Benares between Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the founder of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī, a leading Śāṅkarite *sannyāsī* of

---

\*Editor's Note: This paper was originally presented to the Committee on the Study of Religion, at the University of California in Los Angeles. (November, 1992)

the time. After hearing Prakāśānanda's interpretation of *Vedānta-sūtra*, Śrī Caitanya replied, "The Veda is evident by itself. It is the crown-jewel of all evidence. When it is interpreted, the self-evident quality is lost."<sup>3</sup>

The quality of self-evidence mentioned here is especially apparent, in my view, in the Bhagavad-gītā, which is part of the Mahābhārata. I have therefore selected five specific areas, vital to the Bhagavad-gītā's message, that are especially prone to misinterpretation, and I have attempted to demonstrate from the Bhagavad-gītā itself the consistent, and self-evident view of the speaker, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, especially as He describes Himself.

The first topic is the Gītā's strong monotheism, in which the many gods of the Hindu pantheon are sharply relegated to the status of subordinate servitors to the Supreme Lord. The second topic is that of the separate individuality of Kṛṣṇa as God, distinct from, and transcendental to, the individual entities, who are tiny expansions of the Lord. Third is Kṛṣṇa's standing as the supreme controller. The fourth subject is the delicate issue of monism. I show that despite certain statements in the Gītā to the effect that "Kṛṣṇa is everything," there is nothing like a bald monistic doctrine in the Gītā. Finally, fifth, I argue from the Bhagavad-gītā itself that Kṛṣṇa comes to this world in a spiritual, eternal form, and not a material body, such as those we inhabit.

As mentioned above, these five topics ineluctably lead to a single conclusion: that the real and final topic of the Bhagavad-gītā is Kṛṣṇa Himself, who is inseparably related, and yet eternally transcendental, to the individual souls, of whom we are specimens. This doctrine of *acintya bhedābheda-tattva*, or the inconceivable, simultaneous difference and nondifference of the Lord and the individual souls, is Śrī Caitanya's reading of the Bhagavad-gītā and Vedic literature in general.

I have included the topic that Kṛṣṇa is the controller to drive home the point that the Godhead being talked about in the Bhagavad-gītā is not a vague, wispy Deity whose true ineffable status is but indirectly hinted at by the hierarchical language of mortals. Completely to the contrary, we have in the Gītā a full-blown expression of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent Supreme Lord, commanding, and even poignantly entreating, the individual souls enmeshed in *māyā* to return to Him in His divine abode.

I call this paper "A Beginning Ontology..." because the constraints of time and space have permitted only an introductory statement about the Godhead as He is conceived in the Bhagavad-gītā. In fact, the points I



make here are amplified by the rest of the Bhagavad-gītā. At the very least, I hope this paper will stimulate the reader to investigate the Gītā as far as possible on its own terms. There are certainly esoteric passages in religious scriptures, including the Vedic books. But the guiding Vedic principle is that we should interpret only that which is ambiguous, that which plainly calls for explication of hidden meanings. There are many such statements in the Sanskrit scriptures, but the fundamental message, the central theme, is generally clear.

The verses quoted here are all my own translations, unless otherwise indicated, and I have given great stress on literal accuracy in their rendering. I have endeavored to avoid, thereby, unfounded flights of poetic inspiration, and dubious constructions devised to legitimate tentative insights. However, the point of view here is clearly in the tradition of Śrīpāda Madhvācārya, Śrīpāda Rāmānujācārya, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and other illustrious Vaiṣṇava devotees and scholars, who opposed the monistic interpretation of Śrīpāda Śaṅkarācārya and those in his line. In a sense, one gets here a glimpse of a millennial theological debate in action.

### 1. There is One God

In the Bhagavad-gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa declares Himself to be the Supreme Godhead, and He specifically asserts His supremacy over the well-known gods or demigods of the Vedic and Hindu pantheon. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa is the source of all the other gods that inhabit the cosmos,<sup>4</sup> for He is the source of all that exists.<sup>5</sup> Thus those who worship other gods are ultimately worshipping Kṛṣṇa, the source and sustainer of those gods.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, although the gods may accept offerings from their worshipers, the gods themselves are acting as mere agents of the Supreme God who is the ultimate enjoyer of all types of sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> An ignorant worshiper of the demigods who does not clearly recognize this supremacy of the Godhead falls to a lower status of life.<sup>8</sup>

The demigods cannot award ultimate liberation, since those who attain their worlds fall again to the mortal realm when their pious merit is exhausted.<sup>9</sup> This impermanence holds true not only for the planet of Indra, *surendra-loka* (9.20), or *svarga-loka* (9.21), but indeed for all the worlds within the material cosmos, including that of the creator, *Brahmā*.<sup>10</sup> It is only in the world of the Supreme God, Kṛṣṇa, that one finds the eternal abode, going to which one never returns to take birth in the material world.<sup>11</sup>

Further evidence of the temporary position of the gods is given in the eleventh chapter of the *Gītā*. The cosmic form, which the Lord therein displays, is revealed to be Kṛṣṇa's form and power of Time<sup>12</sup> and even the hosts of gods are overwhelmed and astonished, and enter within Time's destructive power (11.21–22).

Lord Kṛṣṇa is also absolutely superior to the gods in cognitive powers. In all respects, Kṛṣṇa is the origin of the gods. Hence they cannot understand Kṛṣṇa's origin.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, He is beginningless. Not only the gods but the entire universe is bewildered by the modes of nature and thus does not recognize or understand Kṛṣṇa, who is beyond those modes.<sup>14</sup> It is only because of the bewildering influence of the material modes upon the conditioned souls that they worship other gods at all.<sup>15</sup>

The omniscience of Kṛṣṇa is superlatively causal, since Kṛṣṇa is the source of everyone's memory, knowledge, and forgetting.<sup>16</sup> Indeed Kṛṣṇa knows the past, present, and future of all beings, but no one, in the material world, knows Him in truth.<sup>17</sup> In fact, so much are the living beings dependent on Kṛṣṇa, that even their faith in other gods must be supplied by Kṛṣṇa.<sup>18</sup> And the results awarded by those gods are actually given by Kṛṣṇa alone, of whom the gods are but agents.<sup>19</sup>

As Kṛṣṇa is prior to the gods and absolutely superior in powers of being and cognition, so too is the result of worshiping Him: eternal life in the Lord's abode, clearly distinguished from the temporary results derived from worshiping all other powerful beings. And this is confirmed in one of the *Gītā*'s most famous verses, "Men of small intelligence worship the demigods, and their fruits are limited and temporary. Those who worship the demigods go to the demigods, but My devotees come to Me."<sup>20</sup> Similarly: "Those sworn to the gods go to the gods; those sworn to the forefathers go to the forefathers; worshipers of ghostly spirits go to such spirits; but those who worship Me go to Me."<sup>21</sup>

In view of this fundamental distinction between Kṛṣṇa and the gods, and their respective powers to reward their worshipers, only those whose intelligence is stolen by lust worship the gods and neglect the Supreme Godhead.<sup>22</sup> And as stated above, even the temporary fruits awarded by the gods are really provided by Kṛṣṇa alone.<sup>23</sup>

Thus there is nothing at all beyond Kṛṣṇa;<sup>24</sup> He is the great Lord of all the worlds;<sup>25</sup> and He is the creator and sustainer of everything.<sup>26</sup> Within the *Gītā*, Arjuna glorifies Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Abode, the Supreme Purifier, the Supreme Divine Person.<sup>27</sup> Kṛṣṇa is the

God of the gods,<sup>28</sup> and He is the origin of the gods.<sup>29</sup> Kṛṣṇa is the primeval Person.<sup>30</sup> Arjuna further affirms that no one is equal to or greater than Kṛṣṇa.<sup>31</sup>

The Lord ends His teaching in the Gītā by urging Arjuna to abandon all other duties (*dharmān*) and take shelter of Kṛṣṇa alone: *sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja* (18.66). Thus the monotheistic thrust of the Gītā is neither vague nor occasional, and, as shown later in this paper, apparent suggestions of a monistic ontology do not compromise the overwhelming conclusion: the absolute supremacy of Kṛṣṇa.

Arjuna certainly understands Kṛṣṇa to be the Supreme Lord. When asked if he has understood the Lord's teachings, he replies: "My illusion is gone...I shall execute Your instructions."<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Kṛṣṇa and the individual souls are distinct entities

As Lord Kṛṣṇa is eternally the Supreme Person, so the individual souls are, of logical necessity, eternally distinct from and subordinate to the Lord: "Never did I not exist, nor you, nor all these kings. Nor shall we not exist, all of us, for ever after."<sup>33</sup>

Here Kṛṣṇa clearly states that "all of us" (*sarve vayam*)—He, Arjuna, and all the assembled kings—will exist forever, just as they always existed at all times in the past. Indeed, never was there a time when we did not exist. In the previous verse, Kṛṣṇa chided Arjuna for taking the body to be the self. Similarly, in the verse immediately following, Kṛṣṇa will describe the soul as *dehī*, the owner of the body, different from *deha*, the body. Indeed the entire first half of the second chapter of the Bhagavad-gītā makes it clear that our real identity is eternal soul and not the body. Thus, having said that a learned person (*pañḍita*) sees the soul, and not the body, as primary, surely Kṛṣṇa is speaking of the real person, the soul, as He begins to explain to Arjuna the fundamental nature of the world. After all, how can the Lord be *apañḍita*, or foolish? Thus it is the real Kṛṣṇa, the eternal Kṛṣṇa, and the real Arjuna, the eternal Arjuna, who have always existed and always will exist. And all of us, says Kṛṣṇa, will continue to exist in the future.

Similarly, later in the Gītā, we find the following:

There are two [classes of] beings in this world, the perishable and the imperishable. All created forms are perishable, but a soul who

stands at the summit is imperishable.

The Supreme Person, however, is another, and He is declared to be the Supersoul. It is that inexhaustible Lord who has entered the three worlds and sustains them.

Because I am beyond the perishable beings, and greater even than the imperishable, I am thus celebrated in this world, and in the Vedas, as the Supreme Person. One who knows Me in this way to be the Supreme Person is a knower of everything, and he worships Me with all his heart. (15.16-19)

These four verses of the Gītā offer many significant lessons. Kṛṣṇa has defined the term *puruṣottama* to mean the Supreme Person who stands beyond the conditioned souls entangled in the snare of *māyā* and even beyond the highest soul (that is, beyond the liberated soul who stands at the highest point of spiritual perfection). Indeed Monier-Williams in his Oxford Sanskrit dictionary describes *kūṭa-sthaḥ* as the pure soul standing on the unchanging, spiritual platform. Since Kṛṣṇa emphatically declares that the *puruṣottama* is beyond even the liberated soul, we can hardly translate *puruṣa* here as “man” or anything indicative of a material position, since this would not even apply to the *kūṭa-stha* or the liberated soul, and what to speak of the Supreme Person who stands far beyond such a pure soul. Kṛṣṇa uses the word *api*, “even” to make explicit that He is “beyond even the liberated soul.” In other words, it is not the Gītā’s philosophy that one becomes Kṛṣṇa, or equal to Kṛṣṇa, by spiritual liberation. A normal reader would not question that Kṛṣṇa is beyond the conditioned soul, but here the Lord emphasizes by the word *api* that He is beyond even the liberated soul who stands at the summit of spiritual perfection.

The finality of this understanding of the supreme personal individuality of Kṛṣṇa is confirmed at 15.19, wherein Kṛṣṇa states that one who understands Him in this way (*evam*) as the Supreme Person (*puruṣottama*) is the knower of everything (*sarva-vit*) and worships the Lord with all his heart.<sup>34</sup> In other words, Kṛṣṇa explicitly rejects the notion that realization of the personal feature of the Lord is a mere prelude to an eventual impersonal understanding.

Earlier in the fifteenth chapter, Kṛṣṇa states that the living being in this world is eternally a fragmental part (*aṁśa*) of the Lord.<sup>35</sup> The soul is further said to be indivisible,<sup>36</sup> and so the fragmental status is not effectuated in time, but is a pre-eternal, never-ending fact.<sup>37</sup> As Lord Kṛṣṇa simply puts it, God is not one of the ordinary living beings, nor even one of the liberat-

ed souls but, rather, “the Supreme Person is someone else...”<sup>38</sup>

We have already demonstrated that Kṛṣṇa claims to be absolutely cognizant and the source of all other cognition. He makes the same claim in the thirteenth chapter, where He introduces the terms *kṣetra*, “the field” (i.e. the body) and *kṣetra-jñā*, “the knower of the field” (i.e. the soul who is conscious of the body). The Lord concludes this discourse by asserting that although each soul is the knower of his field, i.e. his particular body, “I am the knower of all fields,” meaning all bodies.<sup>39</sup>

In the same thirteenth chapter, Kṛṣṇa describes both the individual soul and the Lord as *puruṣa*—persons—but the contrast is striking. The individual soul is a *puruṣa*, but he is (a) “situated in material nature,” (b) “trying to enjoy the material qualities,” and thus (c) compelled by his attachments to those qualities to take birth in high and low species of bodily engagement.<sup>40</sup>

In the very next verse, the Lord describes Himself also as *puruṣa*, but the difference between the two *puruṣas* could not be more clear, for Kṛṣṇa is said to be the supreme or transcendental *puruṣaḥ* (*puruṣaḥ paraḥ*). The use of the adjective *paraḥ* to denote the supreme *puruṣa* is significant, for this word not only entails the notion of supremacy, but also a strong sense of “the other.” Indeed, *para* is often used in Sanskrit to indicate the opposite of *ātma*- or *sva*-, both of which indicate “self” or “one’s own.” In fact, *ātma* in Sanskrit is the simple reflexive pronoun. In other words, *para* has the unequivocal sense here of the wholly other who is supreme. In this same verse, Lord Kṛṣṇa also uses the term *paramātmā*, describing Himself thus as the “Supreme Soul.”

It should be noted that the adjective *parama* (used with *ātmā* to form *paramātmā*) is almost identical to *para* in conveying supremacy, but that *parama* does not convey the sense of being the “other” in contrast to one’s self. It is this wider term *para* that Kṛṣṇa employs to distinguish Himself, as *puruṣa*, from the ordinary *puruṣa* who is struggling vainly to exploit the Lord’s material creation. Thus the Gītā’s claim that the individual soul is eternally distinct from the Supreme Soul is a strong one, and not a vague or esoteric articulation.

The Lord is also said to be the maintainer of the living beings.<sup>41</sup> It is natural that the Lord maintain the living beings, for they are stated in the Gītā to be the Lord’s own energy: “Besides the material nature, there is another superior energy of Mine. Know it to be the living being...”<sup>42</sup> The living being trapped in the clutches of *māyā*, the Lord’s illusory material

energy, can escape her control only by surrendering to the Lord. He cannot escape by his own autonomous decision or endeavor.<sup>43</sup>

### 3. God Is the Controller

Because God, Kṛṣṇa, is one, and eternally separate from the individual soul, it follows that He is the Lord and controller of all that be. Lord Kṛṣṇa delineates a bipartite notion of causality in which material nature is the cause of the physical workings of the world whereas the living being is the cause of his own enjoyment and suffering.<sup>44</sup> Nature responds to the soul's attempts to exploit the illusory material world by entangling the soul in the web of *māyā*. Perhaps the greatest illusion is the soul's false perception that he is performing those physical events, such as moving of the body, that in fact are done by nature.<sup>45</sup> Nature in turn is directly under the control of the Supreme Lord, and the entire cosmos turns by His command.<sup>46</sup> Thus the causal chain originates in Kṛṣṇa, who states: "I am the Lord of all beings, and I stay in their hearts, causing all beings, who are mounted on the machine (of the body), to wander in this world in illusion."<sup>47</sup>

Kṛṣṇa is a living God who orders, punishes, and reclaims the fallen souls, who are eternally part and parcel of Him. Thus Kṛṣṇa declares, "Those who always faithfully abide by My injunction, without envy, are freed from all karmic acts. But those who are envious and do not abide by My injunction you should know to be mindless and lost, for they are confused about all that is knowledge."<sup>48</sup>

This same point is driven home at the end of the Gītā: "If then because of false ego you will not hear, then you will perish."<sup>49</sup> We will understand Kṛṣṇa without doubt and fully, Kṛṣṇa declares, by hearing from Him.<sup>50</sup>

One achieves real peace by recognizing that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the great Lord of all the worlds.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, one who knows that Kṛṣṇa is the great Lord, and that He is unborn and beginningless, is himself unbewildered among mortal beings and is freed of all sins.<sup>52</sup> Arjuna acknowledges Lord Kṛṣṇa to be the "controller of all beings" and the "Lord of the universe."<sup>53</sup>

Finally, the entire eleventh chapter of the Gītā demonstrates unforgettably way that the entire universe can be devoured in an instant by Lord Kṛṣṇa. His control is absolute, for all beings exist within Him: "When you have thus learned the truth you will never again fall into illusion, for by that knowledge you will see that all living beings are in the Soul—that is, they are in Me."<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. Kṛṣṇa Is Everything

Lord Kṛṣṇa strongly and repeatedly declares in the Bhagavad-gītā that He is the source of all that be. It follows that God is not only distinct from His creative energies but is also one with them, since they are eternally resting on Him. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu thus stated that the philosophy of the Gītā is, ultimately, *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*, which means that God is inconceivably one with, and simultaneously different from, His creation. We shall survey Kṛṣṇa's statements that He is the source of everything, and then see how this claim is logically linked to the claim that "all things are Kṛṣṇa."

Śrī Kṛṣṇa declares in the Bhagavad-gītā: "I am the source of everything; from Me everything emanates."<sup>55</sup> Similarly, He states: "I am the origin and the annihilation of the entire cosmos."<sup>56</sup> Kṛṣṇa goes on to say, "There is nothing else beyond Me, O Dhanañjaya. All this world rests on me like pearls strung on a thread."<sup>57</sup> And as previously quoted, "Neither the hosts of gods nor the great sages know My origin, for in all respects I am the origin of the gods and great sages."<sup>58</sup> Kṛṣṇa is the source not only of the living beings, but of their qualities as well: "Intelligence, knowledge, freedom from confusion [and ten other qualities], in their various types, are states of being of the living entities, and they all come from Me."<sup>59</sup> And also, "The seven primordial sages and the four Manus owe their existence to me for they are born of My mind."<sup>60</sup>

Let us now examine the tenth chapter of the Bhagavad-gītā, wherein Lord Kṛṣṇa claims (10.20–38) to be the superlative exemplar in seventy categories. Here is a sample verse from that section: "Of the Ādityas I am Viṣṇu; of lights I am the radiant sun; of the Maruts I am Marici; of stars I am the moon."<sup>61</sup> To read monism into all of this would be a transparent misreading of the text, for a serious look at the entire chapter makes abundantly clear what Kṛṣṇa is actually saying.

First, we notice that most of Kṛṣṇa's statements, cited above, to the effect that He is the source of everything come from this same tenth chapter, namely verses 10.2, 10.4–5, 10.7, and 10.8. Kṛṣṇa precedes, then, His identification of Himself with the greatest items of this world by emphasizing that He is the source of all these things. Recall that in the seventh chapter Kṛṣṇa stated that all the things of this world are His energy, or *prakṛti* (7.4–6) and that He is therefore the source of all that be.

That Kṛṣṇa is referring to the same ontological state of affairs becomes

clear when we notice the repeated use here of the word *vibhūti*, which indicates the following: glory, expansion, great power, manifestation of might, and so on. Arjuna introduces this term when he says to Kṛṣṇa: "You should speak about Your own divine glories, those by which You pervade these worlds and abide in them."<sup>62</sup> The word for "glories" here is *vibhūṭayaḥ*, the plural form of *vibhūti*. But that is just the beginning of this word's career in the tenth chapter of the Gītā. Arjuna then says, "O Janārdana [Kṛṣṇa], please describe again, and extensively, Your mystic power and might, for as I listen to this ambrosia, I find no satiation."<sup>63</sup> Again, the word for "might" is *vibhūtim*. Lord Kṛṣṇa then answers, agreeing to explain His own divine opulences, and again the word used (10.19) is *vibhūṭayaḥ*, the plural of *vibhūti*. In the very next *śloka*, the Lord begins His identification of Himself with the seventy categories mentioned above. At the end of the narration, Kṛṣṇa says, "O burner of the foe, there is no end to My divine powers, and so I have given some example of the extension of My glory."<sup>64</sup> Predictably the word *vibhūti* is used twice in this verse, and it is repeated in the following verse, wherein Lord Kṛṣṇa says: "Whatever glorious, beautiful, or mighty being there may be, understand that it is born of but a spark of My splendor."<sup>65</sup> Here the word *vibhūti-mat* means "that which possesses *vi-bhūti*—that is: power, glory, etc.

By using the word *vibhūti* no less than six times, Lord Kṛṣṇa makes clear that He is talking about *His powers*, *His properties*, *His opulences*, and so on. In the seventh chapter, there are three "identification verses" (7.9–11) which exactly resemble in meter, language, and content the "identification verses" of the tenth chapter (10.20–38). These three verses, as in the tenth chapter, are preceded by an elaborate analysis of how Lord Kṛṣṇa is the source of all, matter and spirit being His inferior and superior potencies respectively. At the conclusion of 7.9–11, Kṛṣṇa declares that all these opulences with which He has identified Himself come in fact from Him, and are resting in Him, but He is not in them.<sup>66</sup>

It also bears mentioning that one who rightly understands the sense in which Kṛṣṇa is the source of everything does not then consider all beings to be God, but rather worships the real God with wholehearted devotion: "I am the source of all. From Me all proceeds. Knowing this, the wise worship Me with all their being."<sup>67</sup>

The purpose of the identification verses is to nourish the devoted theists, as Kṛṣṇa explains in the verse that follows the one cited above: "Their minds in Me, their lives dedicated to Me, the devotees enlighten one



another, always speaking about Me, and thus they are satisfied and rejoice.”<sup>68</sup> Further, Arjuna explicitly states that it is just to help such meditation on the Lord that he is requesting Kṛṣṇa to describe His glories: “Always thinking of You, O Yogin, how can I know You? In which various forms, my Lord, am I to think about You? Describe to me at length Your glories...etc.”<sup>69</sup> There is hardly a doctrine of pantheism in the Bhagavad-gītā. The real message is quite clear: surrender to Kṛṣṇa.

Lord Kṛṣṇa says that after many births, one in knowledge surrenders to the Lord, realizing that “Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa) is everything.”<sup>70</sup> Arjuna tells Kṛṣṇa, “You cover everything and thus You are everything.”<sup>71</sup> These verses offer devastating evidence against the impersonal, monistic interpretation of the Gītā.

In the first instance, Lord Kṛṣṇa’s statement comes in the midst of a discussion of four types of people who do not surrender to God, and four types who do. Kṛṣṇa’s point in the verse we have cited (7.19) is that surrender to Kṛṣṇa is the sign that one is actually in knowledge, after many lifetimes of seeking the truth. In fact, the learned one who realizes that Kṛṣṇa is everything belongs to one of the four classes of men who surrender to the Lord.

We have already explained at length the many verses in chapter seven, preceding 7.19, which claim that Kṛṣṇa is the source of everything, and that He is identical with the opulent features of this world in the sense that such items, composed of the inferior modes of nature (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*), are but expansions of the Lord’s power. And the verses following 7.19 emphasize that it is Kṛṣṇa alone who is to be worshiped, and not other gods. In other words, the topic under discussion is nothing but surrender to Kṛṣṇa, and an elaborate ontological explanation in this very chapter has clarified that Kṛṣṇa is to be identified with the wonderful things of this world only in the sense that such items rest on Him. It was explicitly stated that Kṛṣṇa is simultaneously aloof, that He is “not in them.”<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, Arjuna declares to Kṛṣṇa: “You are everything because You entirely possess everything.”<sup>73</sup> Arjuna’s statement is in response to the cosmic vision of God, in which Kṛṣṇa devours all the universe, and all beings are subdued by the Lord’s omnipotent feature of time. That is, it is in the context of God’s absolute domination of the subordinate living beings that Arjuna utters His prayer, “You are everything!”

Still, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the somewhat complex

ontology operating here, and Kṛṣṇa Himself provides us such a focused metaphysical analysis in the ninth chapter (4–10), where He intentionally speaks in apparently contradictory language: “By Me in My unmanifest form, this whole universe is pervaded. All beings are situated in Me, but I am not situated in them. The beings are also not situated in Me. Behold My mystic power. I am the maintainer of all beings; I am also not situated in them. My self is the source of the beings. Understand that just as the great wind, which goes everywhere, is situated in the sky, so all beings are situated in Me.”<sup>74</sup>

Lord Kṛṣṇa here makes several ontological distinctions between Himself, God, and the many living beings like us:

1. Kṛṣṇa states that He individually pervades the entire universe. There is no similar claim for any of the individual living beings. (9.4)
2. All beings are situated in Kṛṣṇa, but He is not in them. (9.4)
3. Kṛṣṇa is the maintainer of all beings, but not they of Him. (9.5)
4. Kṛṣṇa is the source (*bhāvana*) of all beings, but not they of Him. (9.5)
5. Lord Kṛṣṇa compares Himself to the sky, and the living beings to the air, which moves within the sky but does not mix with it. (9.6)

This metaphor [in Number 5] is further developed at 13.3, wherein Kṛṣṇa compares the sky to the soul, which does not mix with the body. Kṛṣṇa states at 13.3 that although the sky extends everywhere (*sarva-gaṭam*), because of its subtlety (*saukṣmatvāt*) it does not mix with anything, and hence nothing can taint it (*nopalīpyate*).

At 9.6, then, Kṛṣṇa means to state that although the great winds blow throughout space or the sky, the sky is never covered by the air. By analogy, then, although God contains all living beings within His existence, because of His being superior He cannot be affected by the inferior qualities of the beings He contains. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa states that in an unmanifest form (*avyakta-mūrtinā*) He pervades the universe. Here the term *avyakta*, “unmanifest,” is clearly related to the concept of subtlety in 13.33. This sense of subtlety as a cause or condition of imperceptibility is explicitly given at 13.6, where it is said that the Absolute “is incomprehensible because of its subtlety.”<sup>75</sup> This very word *sūkṣmatvāt* is given at 13.33 to mean “because of its subtlety.”

Thus the analogy of the sky and the air (9.6) is meant to explicate the same message given at 9.4–5: Although Śrī Kṛṣṇa is all-pervading, and al-

though all beings live and exist within His existence, He is always distinct and superior, and is never affected by the inferior qualities of the living beings He contains. Thus it is very difficult to mount anything like a serious argument for monism from the statements of the Bhagavad-gītā.

### 5. Kṛṣṇa has spiritual form

In the Bhagavad-gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa stresses the personality of Godhead as the highest feature of the Absolute Truth and therefore the goal of the yoga process. For example, at 8.8–10, Kṛṣṇa states:

One who is engaged in the practice of yoga, meditating with undeviating consciousness on the Supreme Divine Person, goes to that Supreme Person. One who constantly remembers Him as the primeval scholar, the steady ruler, smaller than the smallest, the creator of everything, as He whose inconceivable form is luminous like the sun and beyond darkness...one who remembers Him thus attains to that Supreme Divine Person.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, Arjuna declares Kṛṣṇa to be the “eternal divine person,”<sup>77</sup> and later Arjuna says, “I consider You the eternal Person.”<sup>78</sup> At this point it is good to recall the strict ontological rule that Kṛṣṇa enunciated at the very beginning of His teaching: “Of the temporary there is no real existence, and of the eternal there is no cessation.”<sup>79</sup> Thus when Arjuna declares Kṛṣṇa the eternal person, it is understood that Kṛṣṇa’s personality has no beginning or end. Indeed Arjuna states that Kṛṣṇa is *ajam*, “unborn” (10.12). It is significant that Kṛṣṇa states that not only He Himself but in fact individual souls in general are beginningless: “Know that both material nature and the individual person [*puruṣa*] are beginningless. It is the accidental qualities and transformations of *prakṛti* that come into being.”<sup>80</sup> So the *sanātana-puruṣa*, the “eternal person,” cannot refer to a material form.

Since Kṛṣṇa is an eternal, supreme, divine person, it is natural that He has an abode, and that is also described within the Gītā: “The sun does not brighten it, nor the moon, nor fire. Having gone to it, they never return—that is My supreme abode.”<sup>81</sup> Similarly: “It is said to be unmanifest and indestructible, and they call it the supreme destination. Having achieved it, they never return from My supreme abode.”<sup>82</sup>

### Spiritually Tangible Form

According to the Bhagavad-gītā, the supreme personality of the Godhead is not merely myth, poetry, or symbol, but rather spiritually tangible form and being, which is *avyakta*, unmanifest, only to the materially conditioned soul. Thus in the seventh chapter of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "The unintelligent think that I am unmanifest, but that I have become a manifest, visible person, for they do not know My supreme nature, which is inexhaustible and of incomparable excellence."<sup>83</sup>

So important is this verse that we shall examine its key terms in detail. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that "the unintelligent [*abuddhayah*, plural of *abuddhi*, literally "those without intelligence"] think [*manyante*] that I am *avyaktam*, unmanifest, but that I have become *vyaktim*, a manifest person." The term *avyaktam* contrasts with the term *vyaktim* not only in the sense of the invisible versus the visible, but also in contrasting a type of impersonal existence with a personal, individual reality. This sense of *avyakta* as impersonal, in contrast to the personal, is clearly evident at 12.1 and 12.3, and is also strengthened by the fact that here at 7.24 Lord Kṛṣṇa contrasts *avyaktam* not with its immediate antonym *vyaktam*, "the manifest," but with the cognate *vyaktim*, which more specifically indicates a manifest, individual person.

Kṛṣṇa says, then, "The unintelligent think that I am impersonal and unmanifest but that I have become a distinct, visible, individual person. They think this because they do not know my supreme, transcendental nature [*param bhāvam*]..." The *param bhāvam*, or "supreme nature," mentioned here is clearly the transcendental nature of the *vyakti*, or visible personal identity of Kṛṣṇa. It is difficult to find another straightforward reading of this simple Sanskrit sentence.

Lord Kṛṣṇa's statement at 7.24 contrasts in a curious way with another use of the terms *avyakta* and *vyakti* at 8.18. There the Lord says, "On the coming of the day [of Brahmā] all the individual beings come forth from the unmanifest, and on the coming of the night [of Brahmā] they are merged into the very place called the *avyakta*."<sup>84</sup>

There are several significant features of this statement. Kṛṣṇa uses the term *vyaktayah*, the plural nominative form of *vyaktiḥ*, and He says that all these *vyaktis* (my translation: "all the individual beings") come forth from the unmanifest, *avyakta*, during the day of Brahmā. Since there is clearly a plurality of living beings mentioned here (and everywhere else in the

Gītā), and since the term *vyakti* is here used to describe the beings at their specific stage of manifestation, coming forth with Brahmā's day, it is clear in this context also that the term *vyakti* refers to an individual, manifest person, active within the world.

Because one might tend to associate the term *vyakti* with the conditioned souls visible in this world, Kṛṣṇa takes care to emphasize, when using the word to refer to Himself, that He does not, as do the conditioned souls, acquire a visible form upon coming to this world. Indeed the entire argument at 7.24 is that Lord Kṛṣṇa does not *assume* His visible, personal form at all, but that His personal form is His superior nature, *param bhāvam*. In fact, Kṛṣṇa explains almost immediately after this, at 8.20, that the *param bhāvam* [inflected here as *paro bhāvaḥ* since it shifts to the nominative from the accusative] is beyond the *avyakta*, the unmanifest from which the ordinary souls come forth on the coming of Brahmā's day.

Although Lord Kṛṣṇa describes that *paro bhāvaḥ* as being a superior *avyakta* or unmanifest realm, we find at 8.21 that here the *paro bhāvaḥ* actually refers to the Lord's supreme abode. In other words, although to ordinary persons His supreme abode is not manifest, Kṛṣṇa descends from His abode so that we can see Him as He is. This is the highest sense of *avatāra*.

The same term *paro bhāvaḥ* has been used at 7.24 to indicate the spiritual nature of Kṛṣṇa's personality, and at 8.20 the term is used specifically to describe the spiritual quality of the Lord's abode, but in either case it is clear that the *paro bhāvaḥ* at 8.20, or indeed the *param bhāvam* mentioned at 7.24, is beyond the *avyakta* mentioned at 8.18 as the status from which conditioned souls, also called *vyaktis*, come forth to manifest in this world.

The conclusion is that the Gītā affirms the spiritual personality of the Lord, which is not a mere symbol of, incarnation of, or way of getting at, etc., an unmanifest impersonal Absolute Truth. Rather Kṛṣṇa is a person. Indeed, according to the Gītā, He is the supreme, eternal, and divine person to whom we are to surrender. And this, in a nutshell, is the essential teaching of Bhagavad-gītā as a whole. But—and this is important—the personal form of the Lord is not to be known by mental speculation. Thus the term *vyaktim* is used also at 10.14 when Arjuna says to Kṛṣṇa, "Neither the gods nor the demons, O blessed Lord, know Thy personality [*vyaktim*]." <sup>85</sup> Rather, "It is by devotion that one knows Me in truth, as I actually am." <sup>86</sup>

### Kṛṣṇa's Humanlike Body

That Lord Kṛṣṇa is ultimately to be known as the Supreme Person is made even more explicit at the beginning of the twelfth chapter. Arjuna asks the Lord, "Who are the greatest knowers of yoga—those who are Your devotees, always engaged in worshiping You, or those who worship the unperishing unmanifest?"<sup>87</sup> Here Arjuna places personal devotion to Kṛṣṇa and worship of the *avyakta*, the unmanifest feature of the Absolute, in direct competition. Kṛṣṇa at once replies, "Always engaged in fixing their minds on Me, those who worship Me with transcendental faith I consider to be most intimately united with Me in yoga."<sup>88</sup> Both in Arjuna's original question (12.1) and in Lord Kṛṣṇa's reply, the personal pronoun indicating Kṛṣṇa (Arjuna's *tvaṁ*, "You," and Kṛṣṇa's *māṁ*, "Me") is used to indicate the personal concept of God, in contrast to the impersonal unmanifest.

The artificiality of the impersonal path for the eternal individual soul is made clear at 12.5, wherein Lord Kṛṣṇa says that in contrast to the path of bhakti, which is *susukhaṁ kartum*, "very joyful to perform" (9.2), the path of meditation on the unmanifest, the ineffable, all-pervading Absolute is just the opposite. It is *duḥkham*, or miserable to perform. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa calls the impersonal path *kleśo 'dhikataras*, or "exceedingly troublesome" (12.5).

Śrī Kṛṣṇa also states: "Because I inhere in a humanlike body, foolish people disrespect Me, for they do not understand My transcendental nature."<sup>89</sup> It is certainly noteworthy here that Lord Kṛṣṇa repeats exactly the same words as in 7.24—"not knowing My transcendental nature" (*param bhāvam ajānanto...* 7.24, 9.11). Thus the unintelligent (*abuddhayaḥ*) who think that Kṛṣṇa has assumed His personal form are compared to the foolish (*mūḍhāḥ*) who disrespect Kṛṣṇa because He appears in a humanlike body.

Kṛṣṇa states at 9.11 that He inheres in a humanlike body. The Sanskrit phrase is *mānuṣīm* (human) *tanum* (a body) *āśritam* (I have inherited in). That which is inherent is essential and intrinsic, and this notion that the Lord originally manifests in a spiritual form is also indicated elsewhere in the Gītā. Let us turn to chapter four of the Gītā, wherein Lord Kṛṣṇa elaborately describes His descent into this world. Lord Kṛṣṇa states:

Although I am unborn and My Self never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all beings, utilizing My own energy I appear by My own potency. Whenever there is a decline of dharma, O Bhārata, and a

prominent rise of *adharma* [irreligion], at that time I manifest My Self. To deliver the pious, to destroy the evil-doers, and to establish *dharma*, I appear in every age."<sup>90</sup>

### Indological Problems

Many of the above points should be clear upon a careful reading of Bhagavad-gītā, and yet for many they are not. The reasons for this are numerous and can largely be attributed to modern Indological methods. If we look at just one scholar's work as representative of the rest, we can see why confusion persists in the academic study of the Gītā. Here is an example in which one scholar has paraphrased the above verses, and then translated the last of the three, in a well-known textbook on Hinduism:

In reality he is apart from the world as the Lord of all beings, but whenever worldly righteousness declines he creates a form for himself out of Prakṛti by his mysterious power [*māyā*] and manifests himself among men:

For the preservation of the righteous, the destruction of the wicked,  
And the establishment of dharma, I come into being from age to age.  
(Bhagavad Gītā 4.8)

There are two serious problems with this "translation": First, the scholar inserts the foreign notion that Kṛṣṇa "creates a form for himself out of Prakṛti by his mysterious power." The view that Kṛṣṇa is different from His personal form, a form presumed here to be made of matter, is not in accord with what Kṛṣṇa says. Indeed He says the opposite.

At 4.6 Kṛṣṇa says that He is "unborn" and that His self "never deteriorates." The word for "self" is the standard term *ātmā*, and *avyaya* means "unperishing, undecaying." The term *avyaya-ātmā* is hard to construe as designating anything different from the personal form of Kṛṣṇa, because in the very next verse Kṛṣṇa states that when He descends He does so by manifesting that same *ātmā* (*tadā ātmānam sṛjāmy aham* 4.7). In other words, the form Kṛṣṇa sends forth to this world is eternal.

In English syntax, Kṛṣṇa simply says, *tadā aham sṛjāmi ātmānam*: "Then I manifest [My] Self." The verb here is *sṛj*: to let go, release, discharge, send forth; also: to create, beget, procreate, etc.

We cannot apply here the latter sense—creating, begetting, etc. After all, Lord Kṛṣṇa has just stated that His *ātmā* is *avyaya*, imperishable, and the

Gītā has clearly said from the outset that things which arise in time also end in time: “For that which is born, death is certain.” [*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur* 2.27] Thus within the clear ontology of the Gītā there is no way in which anything, much less a divine “self,” can come into being and then last forever. There is no such entity in the Bhagavad-gītā.

If we then accept the verb *sṛj* in the alternative sense—to release, discharge, send forth, etc.—we still have nothing like the scholar’s “he creates a form for himself.” Kṛṣṇa appears to be saying something quite different, and quite simple and straightforward: “I send Myself forth to this world.” After all, who else but Kṛṣṇa could order the descent of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme authority by whose order (9.10) all the universe turns?

The other problem with the scholar’s translation is that the phrase “I come into being” makes no sense. Lord Kṛṣṇa has explained that He has always existed (*na tv evāhaṁ jātu nāsam* 2.12); in fact (2.12, 13.20), according to the Gītā, not only Kṛṣṇa but all living entities are beginningless.

The verb the scholar has translated as “I come into being” is *sambhavāmi*, the present tense, first person singular, of *sam-bhū*, which means, first, “to be or come together.” Thus we should understand that Lord Kṛṣṇa is simply stating that by His descent (*avatāra*) He comes together with the souls of this world for their eternal benefit. As Kṛṣṇa has stated twice in the Gītā (9.17, 14.4), He is the father of all living beings, and thus (5.29) He is the well-wishing friend of all.

An additional sense of *sam-bhū* is “to be born or produced from.” But this sense normally requires an ablative noun—the subject of the verb must be born or produced *from* something. In the verse the scholar is translating, such an ablative word is conspicuously absent, and, as explained above, that meaning is anyway theologically impossible.

A third sense of the verb is “to arise, spring up, develop.” This inapplicable sense may be the one the scholar has in mind. But in that case, we may say that Kṛṣṇa arises in this world as the sun rises in the eastern horizon. Surely we would not say that the sun “comes into being” daily.

A fourth sense of the verb, which like the first clearly does apply, is “to prevail, be effective.”

The verb has yet other senses, but the first and fourth, for various contextual and grammatical reasons, are the likely candidates.

Kṛṣṇa concludes the topic of His descent into this world at 4.9: “One who thus understands, in truth, My divine birth and activities does not, upon leaving the body, go to another birth. He goes to Me, O Arjuna.”<sup>91</sup>



Kṛṣṇa says that His birth and activities are divine, *divya*, and of course this is the same adjective we have seen used many times to describe Kṛṣṇa as the supreme divine person. Kṛṣṇa stresses that one must understand His birth in truth (*tattvataḥ*). But if, as some scholars claim, Kṛṣṇa's birth was merely the assuming of an ordinary material form, why would this word of caution be used? And how would mere understanding of His birth be enough to guarantee liberation? The text forces us to look at the position of Kṛṣṇa more seriously.

### ENDNOTES

1. I use Vedic here in the widespread Indian sense to mean the original Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads, as well as the religiously authoritative classic literature such as the Purāṇas, Itihāsas, etc.

2. *ṛg-yajuh-sāmārtharvās ca  
bhārataṁ pañca-rātrakam  
mūla-rāmāyaṇam caiva  
veda ity eva śabditāḥ*

*purāṇāni ca yāniha  
vaiṣṇavāni vido viduḥ  
svataḥ-pramāṇyam eteṣāṁ  
nātra kiñcid vicāryate*

3. *svataḥ-pramāṇa veda—pramāṇa-śiromaṇi  
lakṣaṇā karile svataḥ-pramāṇatā-hāni  
(Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā, 7.132)*

4. *aham ādir hi devānām* (10.2)

5. *aham sarvasya prabhavaḥ* (10.8)

6. *ye 'py anya-devatā-bhaktāḥ...yajanti mām avidhi-pūrvakam* (9.23)

7. *aham hi sarva-yajñānām  
bhoktā ca prabhur eva ca* (9.24)

8. *na tu mām abhijānānti  
tattvenātas cyavanti te* (9.24)

9. *te taṁ bhuktvā svarga-lokaṁ viśālaṁ  
kṣiṇe puṇye martya-lokaṁ viśanti* (9.21)
10. *ā-bhrahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ  
punar-āvartino 'rjuna* (8.16)
11. *yad gatvā na nivartante  
tad dhāma paramam mama* (15.6)  
  
*yaṁ prāpya na nivartante  
tad dhāma paramaṁ mama* (8.21)  
  
*mām upetya tu kaunteya  
punar janma na vidyate* (8.16)
12. *kālo 'smi* (11.32)
13. *na me viduḥ sura-gaṇāḥ  
prabhavaṁ na maharṣayaḥ  
aham ādir hi devānāṁ  
maharṣiṇāṁ ca sarvaśaḥ* (10.2)
14. *tribhir guṇa-mayair bhāvair  
ebhiḥ sarvaṁ idaṁ jagat  
mohitaṁ nābhijānāti  
mām ebhyaḥ param avyayam* (7.13)
15. *yajante sāttvikā devān  
yakṣa-rakṣāṁsi rājasāḥ  
pretān bhūta-gaṇāṁś cānye  
yajante tāmasā janāḥ* (17.4)
16. *sarvasya cāhaṁ hṛdi sanniviṣṭo  
mattaḥ smṛtir jñānam apohanaṁ ca* (15.15)
17. *vedāhaṁ samatītāni  
vartamānāni cārjuna  
bhaviṣyāni ca bhūtāni  
mām tu veda na kaścana* (7.26)
18. *yo yo yāṁ yāṁ tanuṁ bhaktāḥ  
śraddhāyārcitum iḥate*

- tasya tasyācalaṁ śraddhām*  
*tām eva vidadhāmy aham* (7.21)
19. *labhate ca tataḥ kāmām*  
*mayaiva vihitaṁ hi tām* (7.22)
20. *antavat tu phalaṁ teṣām*  
*tad bhavaty alpa-medhasām*  
*devān deva-yajo yānti*  
*mad-bhaktā yānti mām api* (7.23)
21. *yānti deva-vratā devān*  
*pitṛn yānti pitṛ-vratāḥ*  
*bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā*  
*yānti mad-yājino 'pi mām* (9.25)
22. *kāmais tais tair hṛta-jñānāḥ*  
*prapadyante 'nya-devatāḥ* (7.20)
23. *labhate ca tataḥ kāmān*  
*mayaiva vihitaṁ hi tām* (7.22)
24. *mattaḥ parataram nānyat*  
*kiñcid asti dhanañjaya* (7.7)
25. *sarva-loka-maheśvaram* (5.29)
26. *sarvasya dhātāram* (8.9)
27. *paraṁ brahma paraṁ dhāma*  
*pavitraṁ paramaṁ bhavān*  
*puruṣaṁ śāsvataṁ divyam ...* (10.12)
28. *deva-deva* (10.14)
29. *ādi-deva* (10.12)  
*tvam ādi-devaḥ* (11.38)
30. *puruṣaḥ purāṇaḥ* (11.38)
31. *na tvat-samo 'sty abhaydhikaḥ kuto 'nyaḥ* (11.43)

32. *naṣṭo mohaḥ... kariṣye vacanaṁ tava* (18.73)
33. *na tv evāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ  
na tvam neme janādhīpāḥ  
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ  
sarve vayam ataḥ param* (2.12)
34. *...bhajati mām  
sarva-bhāvena bhārata* (15.19)
35. *mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke  
jīva-bhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ* (15.7)
36. *acchedyo 'yam* (2.24)
37. *na tvevāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ  
na tvam neme janādhīpāḥ  
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ  
sarve vayam ataḥ param* (2.12)
38. *uttamaḥ puruṣas tv anyah* (15.17)
39. *kṣetra-jñāṁ cāpi mām viddhi  
sarva-kṣetreṣu bhārata* (13.3)
40. *puruṣaḥ prakṛti-stho hi  
bhūṅkte prakṛti-jān guṇān  
kāraṇaṁ guṇa-saṅgo 'sya  
sad-asad-yoni-janmasu* (13.22)
41. *sarva-bhṛc caiva* (13.5)
42. *apareyam itas tv anyāṁ  
prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parām  
jīva-bhūtām...* (7.5)
43. *daivī hy eṣā guṇa-mayī  
mama māyā duratyayā  
mām eva ye prapadyante  
māyām etaṁ taranti te* (7.14)
44. *kārya-kāraṇa-kartṛtve*

hetur prakṛtir ucyate  
 puruṣaḥ sukha-duḥkhānām  
 bhoktṛtve hetur ucyate (13.21)

45. prakṛteḥ kriyamānāni  
 guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ  
 ahaṅkāra-vimūḍhātmā  
 kartāham iti manyate (3.27)

46. mayādhyakṣena prakṛtiḥ...  
 hetunānena kaunteya  
 jagad viparivartate (9.10)

47. īśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānām  
 hṛd-deśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati  
 bhrāmayan sarva-bhūtāni  
 yantrārūḍhāni māyayā (18.61)

48. ye me matam idaṁ nityam  
 anuṭiṣṭhanti mānavāḥ  
 śraddhāvanto 'nasūyanto  
 mucyante te 'pi karmabhiḥ (3.31)

ye tv etad abhyasūyanto  
 nānuṭiṣṭhanti me matam  
 sarva-jñāna-vimūḍhāṁs tān  
 viddhi naṣṭān aceśasaḥ (3.32)

49. atha cet tvam ahaṅ-kārān  
 na śroṣyasi vīnaṅkṣyasi (18.58)

50. asaṁśayaṁ samagraṁ mām  
 yathā jñāsyasi tac chṛṇu (7.1)

51. sarva-loka-maheśvaram...  
 jñātvā mām śāntim ṛcchati (5.29)

52. yo mām ajam anādīm ca  
 vetti loka-maheśvaram  
 asaṁmūḍhaḥ sa martyeṣu  
 sarva-pāpāiḥ pramucyate (10.3)

53. *bhūteṣa... jagat-pate* (10.15)
54. *yaj jñātvā na punar moham  
evam yāsyasi pāṇḍava  
yena bhūtāni aśeṣāni  
drakṣyasi ātmany atho mayi* (4.35)
55. *aham sarvasya prabhavaḥ  
mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate* (10.8)
56. *aham kṛtsnasya jagataḥ  
prabhavaḥ pralayas tathā* (7.6)
57. *mattaḥ parataraṁ nānyat  
kiñcid asti dhanañjaya  
mayi sarvaṁ idaṁ protaṁ  
sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva* (7.7)
58. *ne me viduḥ sura-gaṇāḥ  
prabhavaṁ na maraṣayaḥ  
aham ādir hi devānāṁ  
maharṣiṇāṁ ca sarvaśaḥ* (10.2)
59. *buddhir jñānam asammohaḥ ...  
bhavanti bhāvā bhūtānām  
matta eva prthag-vidhāḥ* (10.4-5)
60. *maharṣayaḥ sapta pūrve  
catvāro manavas tathā  
mad-bhāvā mānasā jātā ...* (10.6)
61. *āditṙānām aham viṣṇur  
jyotiṣāṁ ravir aṁśumān  
maricir marutām asmi  
nakṣatrāṇām aham śaśi* (10.21)
62. *vaktum arhasy aśeṣeṇa  
divyā hy ātma-vibhūṭayaḥ  
yābhir vibhūṭibhir lokān  
imāṁs tuam vyāpya tiṣṭhasi* (10.16)
63. *vistareṇātmano yogam*

*vibhūtiṁ ca janāradana  
bhūyaḥ kathaya tṛptir hi  
śṛṇvato nāsti me 'mṛtam* (10.18)

64. *nānto 'sti mama divyānām  
vibhūtinām parantapa  
eṣa tūddeṣataḥ prokto  
vibhūter vistaro mayā* (10.40)

65. *yad yad vibhūtimat sattvaṁ  
śrīmad ūṛjitam eva vā  
tat tad evāvagaccha tvam  
mama tejo-'mśa-sambhavam* (10.41)

66. *matta-eveti tām viddhi  
na tv ahaṁ teṣu te mayi* (7.12)

67. *ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo  
mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate  
iti matvā bhajante mām  
budhāḥ bhāva-samanvitāḥ* (10.8)

68. *mac-cittā mad-gata-prāṇā  
bodhayantaḥ paraṣparam  
kathayantaś ca mām nityaṁ  
tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca* (10.9)

69. *kathaṁ vidyām ahaṁ yoginś  
tvām sadā paricintayan  
keṣu keṣu ca bhāveṣu  
cintyo 'si bhagavan mayā* (10.17)

*vistareṇātmano yogam  
vibhūtiṁ ca janārdana  
bhūyaḥ kathaya ...* (10.18)

70. *bahūnām janmanām ante  
jñānavān mām prapadyate  
vāsudevaḥ sarvaṁ iti ...* (7.19)

71. *sarvaṁ samāpnoṣi tato 'si sarvaḥ* (11.40)

72. *na tv ahaṁ teṣu te mayi* (7.12)
73. *sarvaṁ samāpnoṣi tato 'si sarvaṁ* (11.40)
74. *mayā tatam idaṁ sarvaṁ  
jagad avyakta-mūrtinā  
mat-sthāhi sarva-bhūtāni  
na cāhaṁ teṣu avasthitaḥ* (9.4)
- na ca mat-sthāni bhūtāni  
paśya yogam aiśvaram  
bhūta-bhṛṇ na ca bhūta-stho  
mamātmā bhūta-bhāvanaḥ* (9.5)
- yathākāśa-sthito nityaṁ  
vāyuḥ sarvatra-go mahān  
tathā sarvāṇi bhūtāni  
mat-sthānīty upadhāraya* (9.6)
75. *sūkṣmatvāt tad avijñeyam* (13.6)
76. *abhyāsa-yoga-yuktena  
cetasā nānya-gāminā  
paramaṁ puruṣaṁ divyaṁ  
yāti pārthānucintayan*
- kaviṁ purāṇam anuśāsītāram  
aṇor aṇīyāṁsam anusmared yaḥ  
sarvasya dhātāram acintya-rūpam  
āditya-varṇaṁ tamasah parastāt*
- prayāṇa-kāle manasācalena  
bhaktiyā yukto yoga-balena caiva  
bhruvor madhye prāṇam āveśya samyak  
sa taṁ param puruṣam upaiti divyam* (8.8-10)
77. *puruṣaṁ śāsvataṁ divyam* (10.12)
78. *sanātanas tvam puruṣo mato me* (11.18)
79. *nāsato vidyate bhāvo  
nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ* (2.16)



80. *prakṛtiṁ puruṣaṁ caiva  
viddhy anādī ubhāv api  
vikārāṁś ca guṇāṁś caiva  
viddhi prakṛti-sambhavan* (13.20)
81. *na tad bhāsayate sūryo  
na śasāṅka na pāvakaḥ  
yad gatvā na nivartante  
tad dhāma paramaṁ mama* (15.6)
82. *avyakto 'kṣara ity uktas  
tam āhuḥ paramaṁ gatim  
yaṁ prāpya na nivartante  
tad dhāma paramaṁ mama* (8.21)
83. *avyaktaṁ vyaktim āpannam  
manyante mām abuddhayaḥ  
paraṁ bhāvam ajānanto  
mamāvayam anuttamaṁ* (7.24)
84. *avyaktād vyaktayaḥ sarvāḥ  
prabhavanty ahar-āgame  
rātri-āgame praliyante  
tatraivavyakta-saṁjñake* (8.18)
85. *na hi te bhagavan vyaktim  
vidur devā na dānavāḥ* (10.14)
86. *bhaktiā mām abhijānāti  
yāvān yaś cāsmi tattvataḥ* (18.55)
87. *evaṁ satata-yuktā ye  
bhaktās tvām paryupāsate  
ye cāpy akṣāram avyaktaṁ  
teṣāṁ ke yoga-vittamāḥ* (12.1)
88. *mayy āveśya mano ye mām  
nitya-yuktā upāsate  
śraddhayā parayopetās  
te me yuktamatamā matāḥ* (12.2)
89. *avajānanti mām mūḍhāḥ*

mānuṣīm tanum āśritam  
paraṁ bhāvam ajānanto... (9.11)

90. ajo 'pi sann avyayātmā  
bhūtānām īśvaro 'pi san  
prakṛtiṁ svām adhiṣṭhāya  
sambhavāmy ātma-māyayā

yadā yadā hi dharmasya  
glānir bhavati bhārata  
abhyutthānam adharmasya  
tadātmānam sṛjāmy aham

paritrāṇāya sādhuṇām  
viśāya ca duṣkṛtam  
dharma-saṁsthāpanārthāya  
sambhavāmi yuge yuge (4.6-8)

91. janma karma ca me divyam  
evaṁ yo veti tattvataḥ  
tyaktvā dehaṁ punar janma  
naiti mām eti so 'rjuna (4.9)

FROM PURĀṆA-VEDA TO KĀRṢṆA-VEDA:  
THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA AS  
CONSUMMATE SMṚTI AND ŚRUTI INCARNATE

Barbara A. Holdrege

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is one of the most important textual monuments to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* (devotional) traditions. This preeminent Vaiṣṇava text, which is generally held to have originated in South India between the eighth and tenth centuries,<sup>1</sup> invests its teachings with canonical authority by securing for itself a place within the brahmanical Hindu canon of *śruti* and *smṛti* texts. The interplay of *śruti* and *smṛti* can be vividly illustrated through an inquiry into the strategies through which the Bhāgavata Purāṇa assimilates itself to two principal categories of brahmanical scripture: Purāṇa, one of the principal categories of *smṛti* texts; and Veda, the paradigmatic canonical category that is synonymous with *śruti*. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa utilizes a variety of strategies, first, to establish its status as "Purāṇa-Veda," a status that it shares with other Purāṇas; and, second, to claim for itself the transcendent authority of "Kārṣṇa-Veda," the Veda that is identical with Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Godhead, and the culminating scripture of the entire *śruti* and *smṛti* canon.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa establishes itself as an authoritative, encompassing scripture by integrating the religiocultural traditions of South and North India and reconciling the claims of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* with brahmanical orthodoxy. More specifically, it adopts the canonical form of a Purāṇa and incorporates the South Indian devotional traditions of the Ālvars, Tamil Vaiṣṇava poet-saints, within a brahmanical Sanskritic framework that reflects North Indian ideologies.<sup>2</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, as an "*opus universale* attempting to encompass everything,"<sup>3</sup> was ultimately successful in securing for itself canonical status within both orthodox brahmanical traditions and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions—as the most popular and influential of

the eighteen Purāṇas in the brahmanical canon, and as one of the most important scriptures in the Vaiṣṇava canon. Through its Sanskritization of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa provided the foundation for the development of Kṛṣṇa devotional movements in North India. The five classical Vaiṣṇava schools (*sampradāyas*) recognize the authority of this paradigmatic *bhakti* text,<sup>4</sup> and each school has accordingly produced commentaries to demonstrate the Bhāgavata's support of its particular views: the Viśiṣṭādvaita school founded by Rāmānuja (1017–1137); the Dvaita school founded by Madhva (1238–1317); the Dvaitādvaita school founded by Nimbārka (fourteenth century?); the Śuddhādvaita school founded by Vallabha (1479–1531); and the Gauḍīya school founded by Caitanya (1486–1533).<sup>5</sup>

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa gives expression to a new type of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* that is rooted in South Indian devotional traditions: *viraha-bhakti*, which Friedhelm Hardy characterizes more specifically as an “aesthetic-erotic-ecstatic mysticism of separation.”<sup>6</sup> The Bhāgavata is at the same time concerned with domesticating and legitimating its innovative devotional teachings by incorporating them within a Sanskritic framework that accords with the norms of brahmanical orthodoxy. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa's concern to “scripturalize” its *bhakti* teachings by establishing its own canonical authority as a text within the brahmanical Sanskritic canon derives in part from the nature of the brahmanical tradition, which is an elite “textual community”<sup>7</sup> that self-consciously defines itself in relationship to a canon of authoritative scriptures.

The brahmanical canon includes two categories of sacred texts: *śruti*, “that which was heard,” and *smṛti*, “that which was remembered.” The core *śruti* texts are the four Vedic Saṁhitās—R̥g-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sāma-Veda, and Atharva-Veda—which are collections of verses (*ṛcs*), sacrificial formulae (*yajuses*), chants (*sāmans*), and incantations and imprecations (*atharvāṅgirases* or *atharvans*), respectively.<sup>8</sup> The versified portions of the four Saṁhitās are termed *mantras*.<sup>9</sup> The domain of *śruti* was subsequently extended to include not only the Saṁhitās but also the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads.<sup>10</sup> While the domain of *śruti* is in principle circumscribed, *smṛti* is a dynamic, open-ended category, which includes the Dharma-Śāstras, the Itihāsas (the Sanskrit epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki), and the Purāṇas, as well as a variety of other texts that have been incorporated within this ever-expanding category in accordance with the needs of different periods and groups.<sup>11</sup> The primary criterion for distinguishing between *śruti* and *smṛti* texts is generally characterized by both Indian and Western scholars as an ontological distinction between “revelation” and “tradi-

tion."<sup>12</sup> *Śruti* texts—Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads—are traditionally understood to have been directly cognized—"seen" and "heard"—by inspired "seers" (*ṛṣis*) at the beginning of each cycle of creation. The formal schools of Vedic exegesis, Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta, maintain that the *śruti*, or Vedic, texts are eternal (*nitya*), infinite, and *apauruṣeya*, not derived from any personal—human or divine—agent, while the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Yoga schools of Indian philosophy view the Vedic texts as the work of God.<sup>13</sup> All other sacred texts are relegated to a secondary status as *smṛti*, for they are held to have been composed by personal authors and are therefore designated as "that which was remembered" rather than "that which was heard." On the basis of this criterion, the Purāṇas are classified in the brahmanical canon as *smṛti* texts, even though, as we shall see, the Purāṇas seek to identify themselves with *śruti* by claiming the status of the "fifth Veda."

This essay will elucidate the various strategies that the Bhāgavata Purāṇa uses to invest its *bhakti* teachings with canonical authority by assimilating itself to two principal categories of scripture within the corpus of *śruti* and *smṛti* texts: Veda and Purāṇa. In order to highlight the distinctive nature of the Bhāgavata's claims, I will provide a comparative analysis of the Bhāgavata's positions and the positions advanced by other Purāṇas concerning (1) the transcendent authority of the Veda; (2) the Vedic status of the Purāṇas generally; and (3) the unique status of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa within the *śruti* and *smṛti* canon.

### Transcendent Authority of the Veda

The Purāṇas, although technically classified as *smṛti* texts, are nevertheless concerned with appropriating the status of *śruti*, the Veda, and more specifically of the core *śruti* texts at the center of the brahmanical canon, the Vedic Samhitās, or *mantras*. In attempting to assimilate themselves to the Veda, the Purāṇas exemplify a well-documented phenomenon in Indian history whereby any Hindu text or teaching seeking to legitimate its authority had to do so with reference to the Veda. As J. C. Heesterman emphasizes, "The crux of the matter is that the Vedas hold the key to ultimate legitimation. Therefore, even if the Vedas are in no way related to the ways of human life and society, one is still forced to come to terms with them."<sup>14</sup>

The legitimating function of the Veda within Hindu traditions derives from its role as a *transcendent* source of authority. The core *śruti* texts, the

Vedic *mantras*, are represented in the cosmogonic and cosmological speculations of Vedic and post-Vedic texts as eternal, transcendent knowledge that exists perpetually as the source and blueprint of the universe. The Vedic *ṛsis* are portrayed as having the ability to station their awareness on that subtle level where they could “see” and “hear” the impulses of knowledge reverberating forth from the Transcendent as the fundamental rhythms of creation. They subsequently “recorded” on the gross level of speech that which they cognized on the subtle level, and in this way the *mantras* assumed a concrete form on earth as recited texts.<sup>15</sup> The Vedic *mantras* are thus granted the status of transcendent knowledge. Any subsequent text or *śāstric* discourse can participate in that status only by assimilating itself to the Vedic *mantras* through a variety of strategies, including (1) claiming to form part of *śruti*, the original cognitions of the *ṛsis*, in the case of the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads; (2) claiming the status of the “fifth Veda,” in the case of the Itihāsas and Purāṇas;<sup>16</sup> (3) establishing a genealogy that directly links the text’s teachings to the Veda or to some form of divine revelation, in the case of the Manu-Smṛti; (4) claiming that the text’s teachings derive from lost Vedic texts, a claim that could potentially apply to all *smṛti* texts;<sup>17</sup> or (5) otherwise conforming to the model of the Veda.<sup>18</sup> Through such strategies the term Veda is extended beyond the circumscribed boundaries of the Vedic *mantras* and, through a process of “vedacization,” comes to include within its purview not only an expanded array of *śruti* texts but also potentially all *smṛti* texts and teachings that are promulgated by brahmanical authorities.<sup>19</sup>

Such strategies, including a variety of other modes of assimilation, have been used not only by exponents of the brahmanical hierarchy but also by nonbrahmanical Hindu groups to invest their sacred texts with the transcendent authority of the Veda.<sup>20</sup> The domain of Veda is thereby expanded beyond the brahmanical Sanskrit canon of *śruti* and *smṛti* texts to include a variety of vernacular texts derived from nonbrahmanical origins. For example, the *Tiruvāymoḻi* of Nammālvār (ca. ninth century)—the Tamil hymns composed by one of the most acclaimed of the South Indian Ālvārs—are said to represent the four Vedic Saṁhitās and are designated as the “Dravidian Veda” or “Tamil Veda.”<sup>21</sup> The *Rāmcāritmānas* of the poet Tulsidās (ca. sixteenth century), a Hindi version of the Rāmāyaṇa popular throughout North India, has been ascribed a similar status as the “fifth Veda” or “Hindi Veda.”<sup>22</sup> Even scriptures derived from non-Hindu traditions have at times been identified with the Veda. For example, in South India certain Tamil Christians

deem the Bible to be the "true Veda,"<sup>23</sup> while Tamil Muslims invest the Qur'an with a comparable status.<sup>24</sup> While some groups have thus sought to legitimate their texts through assimilating them to the Veda, certain *bhakti* and tantric movements have responded to the Veda by rejecting or subverting its authority.<sup>25</sup> Whether the Veda is revered or rejected, appropriated or subverted, it remains a symbol invested with authoritative power that must be contended with by all those who wish to position themselves in relation to the brahmanical hierarchy.

The Purāṇas, like other brahmanical texts, utilize a variety of strategies to assimilate themselves to the Veda. These vedacizing strategies have their starting-point in a series of sustained reflections on the transcendent authority of the Veda that are found in most of the major Purāṇas, often in the form of standardized descriptions and formulaic statements that are shared by many of the Purāṇic texts. Four types of formulations are of particular importance in that they serve to ground the Purāṇas' own claims to Vedic status. These formulations are concerned with establishing the relationship of Veda to Brahman, the ultimate reality, as well as to the three principal agents in the process of Vedic transmission: the creator Brahmā, the Vedic ṛṣis, and the sage Veda-Vyāsa.

### Veda and Brahman

In the Purāṇas Brahman is represented as assuming a personalized form as the supreme Godhead who, in accordance with the sectarian emphasis of the particular Purāṇa, is celebrated as the object of devotion—whether Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, or Devī (the Goddess). The Purāṇas emphasize that the nature of the supreme Godhead, as Brahman, is knowledge, and the Veda constitutes both the inner essence and the outer form of this reality.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa, for example, celebrates Viṣṇu as Brahman, whose nature is knowledge (*jñāna-svarūpa*),<sup>26</sup> who is knowledge incarnate (*jñāna-mūrti*),<sup>27</sup> and who is one with the Vedas,<sup>28</sup> his form being composed of the Vedic *mantras*.

He is composed of the *ṛcs*, of the *sāmans*, of the *yajuses*, and he is the Self (*ātman*). He whose Self is the essence of the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans*, he is the Self of embodied beings. Consisting of the Veda (*veda-maya*), he is divided; he forms the Veda with its branches (*śākhās*) into many divisions. Creator of the *śākhās*, he is the *śākhās* in their totality, the infinite Lord, whose very nature is knowledge (*jñāna-svarūpa*).<sup>29</sup>

Another passage in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa describes the Vedic *mantras* and their supplements, the Vedāṅgas and Upavedas, together with the Itihāsas, Dharma-Śāstras, and other sacred texts, as the body (*vaṇu*) of Viṣṇu in the form of sound/word (*śabda-mūrti*).<sup>30</sup> The Veda as such is Śabdabrahman, Brahman embodied in the Word.

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa it is Kṛṣṇa—variously designated as Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva, and Hari—who is identified with Brahman and celebrated as the supreme Lord, Bhagavān, whose Self is the threefold Veda (*trayī-vidyātman*)<sup>31</sup> and whose very substance is Veda (*sarva-veda-maya*).<sup>32</sup> The Bhāgavata emphasizes that the Veda constitutes both his inner nature and his outer form. The cosmic body (*tanū*) of Kṛṣṇa is identified with the Veda as Śabdabrahman<sup>33</sup> and is said to be composed of the Vedic *mantras*.<sup>34</sup> He is celebrated more specifically as the embodiment of Veda when he assumes the form of a sacrificial boar (*yajña-varāha*), his body constituted by the Vedic *mantras* and the elements of the sacrifice, so that he may rescue the earth from the cosmic waters in which it is submerged.<sup>35</sup>

Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is extolled as the embodiment of knowledge whose form is constituted by the Vedas not only in Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas such as the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, but also in nonsectarian Purāṇas such as the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and in cross-sectarian Purāṇas such as the Matsya and Kūrma Purāṇas that contain both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva material.<sup>36</sup> For example, the Matsya Purāṇa, in its account of creation, eulogizes Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, who is identified with Brahman, as the secret essence of the Vedas (*vedānām rahasya*) whose very substance is Veda (*veda-maya*).<sup>37</sup>

In Śaiva Purāṇas such as the Śiva Purāṇa, it is Śiva who is extolled as the supreme Brahman whose Self is knowledge (*jñānātman*) and who is composed of the three Vedas (*trayī-maya*).<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Śiva in his manifest form is described as Śabdabrahman, his body constituted by the forty-eight *varṇa*-sounds of Sanskrit and the Vedic *mantras*.<sup>39</sup>

### Veda and Brahmā

The creator Brahmā is described in the Purāṇas as the manifest form that Brahman—whether identified with Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, or Devī—assumes for the purpose of fashioning the forms of creation. The demiurge Brahmā, as a manifest expression of the nature of Brahman, is extolled as the embodiment of knowledge and Veda incarnate.



The Viṣṇu Purāṇa describes Brahmā as “Hiraṇyagarbha, that form of Brahman which consists of Lord Viṣṇu and which is composed of the Ṛg-, Yajur-, and Sāma-Vedas.”<sup>40</sup> The Kūrma Purāṇa declares the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, *sāmans*, and *atharvans* to be the inherent form (*sahaja rūpa*) of Brahmā,<sup>41</sup> and he in turn is said to be the embodiment of the Vedic *mantras* (*chando-mūrti*)<sup>42</sup> as well as their repository (*veda-nidhī*).<sup>43</sup>

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa the creator Brahmā is at times identified with Śabdabrahman,<sup>44</sup> and in this capacity he is celebrated as Veda incarnate, who is composed of Veda (*veda-māya*)<sup>45</sup> and the abode of Veda (*veda-garbha*).<sup>46</sup> The various aspects of Brahmā’s being, as Śabdabrahman, are described as constituted by the Sanskrit *varṇas* and the Vedic *mantras* and meters.<sup>47</sup>

While on one level the creator Brahmā is depicted as Veda incarnate whose form is composed of the Vedic *mantras*, on another level he is said to be the source of the Vedic *mantras*. It is in this latter capacity that Brahmā assumes his role as the first agent in the process of Vedic transmission. The Vedic *mantras* are often depicted in Purāṇic cosmogonies as emerging from Brahmā at the beginning of creation as the expressions of his speech. A number of the Purāṇas contain a standardized description of the four types of Vedic *mantras*—*ṛcs*, *yajuses*, *sāmans*, and *atharvans*—issuing forth from the four mouths of Brahmā—eastern, southern, western, and northern, respectively—along with certain Vedic *stomas* (lauds), *sāmans*, meters, and sacrifices.

From his eastern mouth he [Brahmā] formed the *gāyatrī* meter, the *ṛcs*, the *trivṛt stoma*, the *rathantara sāman*, and the *agniṣṭoma* sacrifice. From his southern mouth he brought forth the *yajuses*, the *triṣṭubh* meter, the *pañcadaśa stoma*, the *bṛhat sāman*, and the *uktha* portion of the Sāma-Veda. From his western mouth he brought forth the *sāmans*, the *jagatī* meter, the *saptadaśa stoma*, the *vairūpa sāman*, and the *atirātra* sacrifice. From his northern mouth he brought forth the *ekaviṃśa stoma*, the *atharvan*, the *apṭoryāman* sacrifice, the *anuṣṭubh* meter, and the *vairāja sāman*.<sup>48</sup>

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa provides a variant of the standard account that explicitly links the emergence of the Vedic *mantras* from Brahmā’s mouths to the cosmogonic process through which he brings forth the forms of creation.

While he was contemplating, “How shall I bring forth the aggregate worlds as before?” the Vedas issued from the four mouths of the creator. . . . From his eastern and other mouths he brought forth in succession the Vedas known as Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva. . . .<sup>49</sup>

There is creative power in the primordial impulses of speech that issue forth from the mouths of Brahmā as the Vedic *mantras*. When the demiurge wishes to call the forms of creation into being, he simply recites the Vedic *mantras*, which are represented as the eternal, archetypal blueprint through which manifold worlds and beings are projected into concrete manifestation. Purāṇic cosmogonies regularly incorporate a standardized description of Brahmā structuring the names, forms, and functions of all beings from the Vedic words.

In the beginning he [Brahmā] formed, from the words (*śabdās*) of the Vedas alone, the names, forms, and functions of the gods and other beings. He also formed the names and appropriate offices of all the *ṛṣis* as heard (*śrūta*) in the Vedas.<sup>50</sup>

### Vedic Ṛṣis

The Vedic *ṛṣis*, who cognize and preserve the primordial impulses of speech that issue forth from the mouth of Brahmā, are the second link in the process of transmission of the Vedic *mantras*. Purāṇic representations of the Vedic *ṛṣis* are embedded in cosmogonic speculations concerning the various cycles of creation that distinguish between primary creations (*sarga*), which occur at the beginning of each new lifetime of Brahmā, and secondary creations (*pratisarga*), which occur at the beginning of each new day in the life of Brahmā, or *kalpa*. In this context the *ṛṣis'* cognitions of the Vedic *mantras* are depicted not as a unique, one-time event but rather as an eternally recurring process that takes place at the beginning of each new *kalpa* as well as at the beginning of each of the thousand *mahāyugas* (cycles of four *yugas*, or ages) that make up a *kalpa*.<sup>51</sup>

The *ṛṣis* are represented in the Purāṇas as semidivine beings of extraordinary knowledge and power who know the past, present, and future and who remain unaffected by the minor dissolution (*pralaya*) that occurs at the end of each *kalpa* when Brahmā sleeps for a night. When the three lower worlds and all lower beings are absorbed within the body of Brahmā during the *pralaya*, the Vedas become unmanifest and the *ṛṣis* retire along with the gods to the higher worlds.<sup>52</sup> When the next *kalpa* begins the *ṛṣis* reappear and assist Brahmā in bringing forth various types of beings and also in reintroducing the Vedas onto earth. At the end of each of the thousand *mahāyugas* that make up a *kalpa* the Vedas once again disappear from the earth, and at the beginning of each new *mahāyuga* the *ṛṣis* assume their cyclical role of reintroducing the Vedas.

At the end of the four *yugas* the disappearance of the Vedas occurs. The seven *ṛṣi*s, having come down to earth from heaven, again introduce them.<sup>53</sup>

The special cosmic *dharma* of the Vedic *ṛṣi*s, according to the Purāṇas, is thus to reintroduce the Vedic *mantras* at the beginning of the various cycles of creation. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa provides an account of the role of the *ṛṣi*s in establishing the Vedic recitative tradition through which the *mantras* are preserved and transmitted generation after generation. In this account, the creator Brahmā, as the “first *ṛṣi*” (*ādi-kavi*),<sup>54</sup> brings forth the Vedic *mantras* from his four mouths in the beginning of each *kalpa* and then transmits them to his mind-born sons, the *brahmarṣi*s (brahmin seers). The *brahmarṣi*s preserve the Vedic *mantras* through recitation and subsequently teach the *mantras* to their own sons, thereby inaugurating the tradition of recitative transmission through which the Vedas are passed down to each succeeding generation.<sup>55</sup>

### Veda-Vyāsa

The Purāṇas emphasize that the primordial Veda that issues forth from Brahmā’s mouths at the beginning of each *kalpa* is a single unitary totality, which, according to Purāṇic calculations, comprises 100,000 verses. The primordial Veda consists of four quarters (*catus-pāda*), which remain as one whole as long as human understanding is capable of grasping knowledge in its totality. However, as the *mahāyuga*, or cycle of four *yugas*, progresses—from Kṛta Yuga to Tretā Yuga to Dvāpara Yuga to Kali Yuga—the strength, understanding, and morality of human beings progressively decline and their knowledge of the Veda gradually diminishes. For this reason, in each Dvāpara Yuga it becomes necessary to divide the Veda into four distinct parts in order to facilitate its preservation and understanding as well as to promote the performance of the Vedic sacrifices.

The Purāṇas ascribe the task of dividing the Veda to Veda-Vyāsa, who thus assumes the role of the third principal agent in the process of transmission of the Vedic *mantras*. In the Purāṇas “Veda-Vyāsa” is not the name of a specific individual but rather the designation for a particular position—“divider of the Veda” (Veda-Vyāsa)—that is filled by different *ṛṣi*s in successive Dvāpara Yugas. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana is the *ṛṣi* who fulfilled the function of Veda-Vyāsa in the most recent Dvāpara Yuga. As the twenty-eighth in the sequence of Vyāsas in the current *manvantara*, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa is acclaimed in the Purāṇas as the supreme *ṛṣi* among *ṛṣi*s, who is him-

self the partial incarnation of Viṣṇu and who is the author of the great epic, the Mahābhārata.<sup>56</sup> He is also credited with compiling the eighteen Purāṇas. Vyāsa's dual role as divider of the Veda and compiler of the Purāṇas is of central concern to the Purāṇas in their claims to Vedic status, as will be discussed in a later section.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa celebrates Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa as the partial incarnation of the supreme Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, who is Bhagavān himself.<sup>57</sup> Like the ancient ṛṣis who cognized the Vedic *mantras*, this greatest of all ṛṣis is said to be endowed with the faculty of divine sight (*divya cakṣus*) and unerring vision (*amogha-dṛṣ*) through which he knows the past, present, and future.<sup>58</sup> As we shall see, the Bhāgavata is especially concerned with Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa's role in composing the Bhāgavata Purāṇa itself as the culmination of the entire *śruti* and *smṛti* canon.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other Purāṇas generally concur in their accounts of the process through which Vyāsa divides and disseminates the Veda, with the Viṣṇu Purāṇa providing the most extensive account.<sup>59</sup> In order to make the Veda more comprehensible, Vyāsa separates out the four types of *mantras*—*ṛcs*, *yajuses*, *sāmans*, and *atharvans*—and arranges them in sections (*vargas*), forming four Saṁhitās, or collections, of *mantras*.<sup>60</sup> In this conception the distinction between the terms *mantra* and Saṁhitā is vital, for although the four kinds of *mantras* emerge in the very beginning of each *kalpa*, the formal collections—Rg-Veda Saṁhitā, Yajur-Veda Saṁhitā, Sāma-Veda Saṁhitā, and Atharva-Veda Saṁhitā—only come into existence in the third of the four *yugas* through the agency of Vyāsa.

Having separated out the *ṛcs*, the sage compiled the Rg-Veda; having separated out the *yajuses*, he compiled the Yajur-Veda; and with the *sāmans* he compiled the Sāma-Veda. With the *atharvans* the master formed all the ceremonies suitable for kings and the function appropriate for the *brahman* priest.<sup>61</sup>

The Purāṇas go on to describe how Vyāsa transmitted each of the four Vedas—Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva—to his four main disciples, respectively. His disciples subsequently divided their respective Vedas into branches (*śākhās*) and passed them down to their own disciples, who subdivided them even further, and so on.<sup>62</sup> In this way, the one vast tree of the Veda, having been divided by Vyāsa into four stems, developed into an extensive forest consisting of countless branches.<sup>63</sup> After giving a detailed description of the process through which the Veda is divided into four parts and subse-

quently into innumerable *śākhās*, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa asserts that this process does not affect the eternal status of the Veda.

Thus the *śākhās* have been enumerated, and the subdivisions of the *śākhās*, their founders, and the reason for their division have been declared. The same divisions of the *śākhās* are established in all the *manvantaras* (intervals of Manu). The *śruti* derived from Prajāpati [Brahmā] is eternal (*nitya*). These [*śākhās*] are only its modifications (*vikalpas*).<sup>64</sup>

Although the division of the Veda into *śākhās* in each Dvāpara Yuga serves to facilitate its preservation and understanding, it is inevitable, according to the Purāṇas, that in the course of time as Dvāpara Yuga passes into the final *yuga*, Kali Yuga, human intelligence and morality continue to decline and sin and corruption increasingly prevail, until eventually, by the end of Kali Yuga, knowledge of the Vedas is entirely lost from human consciousness. In this way, at the end of each *mahāyuga* the Vedas disappear from the earth. At the beginning of the subsequent *mahāyuga* the *ṛṣis* again reintroduce the Vedic *mantras* by giving vocalized expression on the gross level of speech to the subtle reverberations of the eternal Veda.<sup>65</sup>

### Vedic Status of the Purāṇas

The Purāṇas, having affirmed the transcendent authority of the Veda through their own distinctive formulations, seek to participate in that status by assimilating themselves to the Vedic *mantras*. The relationship of the Purāṇas with the Veda has been debated by both Indian and Western scholars, with some scholars arguing that there is a close connection between the two classes of scripture and others arguing that there is little or no connection.<sup>66</sup> The Purāṇas themselves claim direct continuity with the Veda and utilize a variety of strategies to substantiate their claims to Vedic status. The starting-point for Purāṇic reflections on the relationship between the Purāṇas and the Veda entails clarifying the characteristics that distinguish a "Purāṇa" and establishing their special status as a distinctive "Purāṇic canon" within the larger brahmanical corpus of sacred texts.

### The Purāṇic Canon

The category of "Purāṇa" is one of the principal categories of *smṛti* texts within the brahmanical Sanskrit canon. However, as Giorgio Bonazzoli

has demonstrated, within the larger brahmanical canon the Purāṇas also form their own distinctive "canon." The Purāṇas use a number of mechanisms to delimit the Purāṇic canon and to establish the authenticity and authority of those texts that are included in the canon.<sup>67</sup>

First, the Purāṇas attempt to delimit the Purāṇic canon by including in their own texts lists of the eighteen authoritative Mahāpurāṇas (major Purāṇas), as distinct from the eighteen Upapurāṇas (minor Purāṇas).<sup>68</sup> The standard lists given in the various Purāṇas include the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as the fifth of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas: Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Bhāgavata, Nārada, Mārkaṇḍeya, Agni, Bhaviṣya, Brahmavaivarta, Liṅga, Varāha, Skanda, Vāmana, Kūrma, Matsya, Garuḍa, Brahmāṇḍa.<sup>69</sup>

A second mechanism used by a number of the Purāṇas to standardize the Purāṇic canon involves including in their enumerations of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas idealized representations of the number of *ślokas* (verses) contained in each Purāṇa, which do not correspond to the actual number of *ślokas* in the extant printed editions of the Purāṇas. The total number of *ślokas* in all the Purāṇas taken together is said to be 400,000 (four lakhs)—a number that figures prominently in Purāṇic theories of their own origins. Among these idealized representations, the Bhāgavata is consistently said to contain 18,000 *ślokas*.<sup>70</sup>

A third strategy used by the Purāṇas to establish their canonical authority is to invoke the classical definition of a Purāṇa, which is said to be distinguished by five characteristics (*pañca-lakṣaṇa*): descriptions of the creation (*sarga*) and of the re-creation (*pratisarga*) of the universe after its periodic dissolutions; genealogies of gods, sages, and kings (*vaṁśa*); accounts of the ages of Manu (*manvantara*); and histories of the royal dynasties (*vaṁśānu-carita*).<sup>71</sup> However, the extant Purāṇas contain much more than this definition suggests, and some give only minimal attention to these five topics.<sup>72</sup> The *pañca-lakṣaṇa* definition nevertheless remains a sign of authenticity, and hence even those Purāṇas that do not conform to the definition make reference to the *pañca-lakṣaṇa* as the distinguishing marks of a Purāṇa.<sup>73</sup>

A fourth mechanism used to establish the canonical authority of the Purāṇas is to ascribe their authorship to Vyāsa, one of the most renowned sages of the brahmanical tradition. As mentioned earlier, in addition to dividing the one Veda into four distinct Samhitās, this great ṛṣi is credited with accomplishing two additional literary feats: he composed the epic, the Mahābhārata; and he subsequently compiled and disseminated the eighteen Purāṇas. Purāṇic traditions concerning the role of Vyāsa in forming

the Purāṇic canon will be discussed in a later section.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa follows the example of earlier Purāṇas and uses each of these four mechanisms in order to secure its canonical status as a Purāṇa. First, the Bhāgavata mentions the distinction between major (*ma-hat*) and minor (*alpā* or *kṣullaka*) Purāṇas<sup>74</sup> and makes reference twice to the standard list of eighteen Mahāpurāṇas in which it has a place.<sup>75</sup> Second, the Bhāgavata includes an idealized list of the number of *ślokas* contained in each Purāṇa, in which it ascribes to itself and to the other seventeen Mahāpurāṇas the standard number of *ślokas*.<sup>76</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa fulfills the third criterion of authenticity by making explicit reference to the *pañca-lakṣaṇa* and dealing with all five topics. At the same time it expands upon the normative tradition by incorporating the five topics into an extended list of ten characteristics, *daśa-lakṣaṇa*, that distinguish a Purāṇa.<sup>77</sup> Finally, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa builds on the Purāṇic traditions concerning the role of Vyāsa in forming the Purāṇic canon and attempts to surpass these earlier traditions, as we shall see, by establishing its own preeminent status as the last of the eighteen Purāṇas compiled by Vyāsa, which constituted the culmination and fruition of his long career.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa thus accords with Purāṇic standards of authenticity in order to secure its place in the Purāṇic canon. In adopting the Purāṇic literary form, the Bhāgavata appears to have used the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in particular as its model. It follows the general scheme of topics found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa while at the same time expanding upon and reconfiguring the scheme.<sup>78</sup> More specifically, the life of Kṛṣṇa and his love-play with the cowmaidens (*gopīs*) of Vṛndāvana, which are celebrated in Book 10 of the Bhāgavata, appear to have been modeled after the *gopī* episodes in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.<sup>79</sup> The Prahlāda episode in Book 7 of the Bhāgavata similarly appears to have been modeled after the Viṣṇu Purāṇa's accounts of Prahlāda.<sup>80</sup> However, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, in its portrayals of the devotion of the *gopīs* and of Prahlāda, introduces important innovations—in particular, in its representations of *bhakti* as a passionate, sensual, ecstatic love of the Lord, in contrast to the more intellectual, contemplative *bhakti* expressed in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.<sup>81</sup>

While the Bhāgavata Purāṇa thus conforms with the Purāṇic model, particularly as represented by the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, it at the same time distinguishes itself from the other Purāṇas in significant ways. First, it is the most unified and homogeneous of all the Purāṇas. M. Winternitz remarks that "it is the one Purāṇa which, more than any other of the others, bears the stamp of a unified composition, and deserves to be appreciated as a literary

production on account of its language, style and metre.”<sup>82</sup> Second, the homogeneity of the Bhāgavata is characterized by a consistent focus throughout the text on *bhakti*—and, moreover, a distinctive type of *bhakti*—in contrast to the more sporadic treatment of devotional concerns in the other Purāṇas. Third, the language and style of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa are different from those of the other Purāṇas. In contrast to the epic-Purāṇic vernacular Sanskrit that is generally employed in the Purāṇas,<sup>83</sup> the Bhāgavata Purāṇa regularly uses Vedic grammatical forms and vocabulary, as we shall discuss further when we turn to an analysis of the Bhāgavata's vedacizing strategies.

### Purāṇas as the “Fifth Veda”

The Purāṇas, while delimiting themselves as a distinctive Purāṇic canon, are at the same time concerned with elevating their status within the larger brahmanical canon by moving beyond their ascribed classification as *smṛti* texts and connecting themselves with *śruti*, the Veda. As members of the Purāṇic canon, the various Purāṇic texts tend to adopt a parallel set of strategies to assimilate the Purāṇas—as a general canonical category—to the Veda. Their claims on occasion extend beyond the limits of the Purāṇic canon to include the Itihāsas and Purāṇas together, as two categories of *smṛti* texts that aspire to *śruti* status.

The Purāṇas at times simply assert their identity with the Veda, claiming for both the Itihāsas and the Purāṇas the status of the “fifth Veda” alongside the four Vedas—Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva—that constitute the core *śruti* texts.<sup>84</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, for example, after relating how Vyāsa divided the one Veda into four, declares that the Itihāsas and Purāṇas are the fifth Veda.

The four Vedas were separated out under the names Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva. And the Itihāsas and Purāṇas are said to be the fifth Veda.<sup>85</sup>

The Vedic antecedents of the notion that the Itihāsas and Purāṇas are the fifth Veda is found in the Upaniṣads. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad includes in four places a formulaic enumeration of brahmanical sacred texts and sciences that begins each time with “the Rg-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sāma-Veda, the Atharvaṇa as the fourth, Itihāsa and Purāṇa as the fifth Veda among the Vedas. . . .”<sup>86</sup> The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad describes the Itihāsa and Purāṇa as being “breathed forth” from the great Being (*bhūta*) along



with the R̥g-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sāma-Veda, and *atharvāṅgīrasas*, although the expression “fifth Veda” is not used in this context.<sup>87</sup>

The Purāṇas sometimes invoke the designation “Purāṇa-Veda” to assert their dual status as Purāṇas that form part of the Veda.<sup>88</sup> They also declare themselves to be equal to the Vedas (*veda-samīta*, *veda-sammīta*, *brahma-samīta*)—a claim that is repeatedly made by the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.<sup>89</sup>

A number of the Purāṇas emphasize that knowledge of the Vedas is not sufficient but must be supplemented by knowledge of the Purāṇas.

A brahmin who knows the four Vedas with their subsidiary limbs (*aṅgas*) and Upaniṣads but who does not know the Purāṇa is not really learned. With both Itihāsa and Purāṇa one should complement the Veda. The Veda is afraid of one with little knowledge.<sup>90</sup>

### Primordial Origins of the Purāṇas

The Purāṇas attempt to substantiate their claims to Vedic status by providing accounts of their origins that parallel Vedic accounts, both in their emphasis on primordial origins and in their focus on the sage Vyāsa’s role in the process of transmission.

One tradition, which is found in the Matsya, Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa, Śiva, and Padma Purāṇas, claims that at the beginning of each cycle of creation a single primordial Purāṇa emerges from the creator Brahmā as the “first of all the *śāstras*,” even prior to the Vedas. This Purāṇa, consisting of one billion (one hundred crores) *ślokas*, is first recalled by Brahmā, after which the Vedas issue forth from his mouths.

Of all the *śāstras* the Purāṇa was first recalled (*smṛti*) by Brahmā—eternal (*nitya*), consisting of the Word (*śabda-maya*), holy, having the extent of a hundred crores [of *ślokas*]. Afterward the Vedas issued forth from his mouths and also Mimāṃsā and the science of Nyāya together with the eight-fold means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*).<sup>91</sup>

This Purāṇic tradition emulates the Vedic paradigm by invoking the notion of an eternal, primordial Purāṇa that parallels the notion of an eternal, primordial Veda. At the same time this primordial Purāṇa surpasses the primordial Veda in terms of its chronological priority—as the “first of all the *śāstras*”—and in terms of its vast extent—one billion verses (Purāṇa) versus 100,000 verses (Veda).

According to an extended account given in the Matsya Purāṇa, it is through the agency of Vyāsa, the partial incarnation of Viṣṇu, that the one primordial Purāṇa—which as the “first of all the *śāstras*” was also the “source of all the *śāstras*”—came to assume its present earthly form as eighteen Purāṇas. Vyāsa, the sage responsible for dividing the primordial Veda of 100,000 verses into four Saṁhitās in every Dvāpara Yuga, is credited with performing a parallel task in every Dvāpara Yuga with respect to the Purāṇas: he condensed the primordial Purāṇa of one billion *ślokas* into an abridged edition of 400,000 (four lakhs) *ślokas* and subsequently divided the abridged edition into eighteen Purāṇas. Although it thus assumed a modified earthly form, the original Purāṇa of one billion *ślokas* continues to exist in the world of the gods (*deva-loka*).<sup>92</sup> Variants of this account are found in the Śiva, Nārada, Padma, and Liṅga Purāṇas.<sup>93</sup>

An alternative tradition concerning the origins of the Purāṇas is found in the Brahmāṇḍa, Vāyu, and Viṣṇu Purāṇas. This tradition relates how Vyāsa, after dividing the primordial Veda by separating out the four types of Vedic *mantras* to form the four Vedic Saṁhitās, then proceeded to compile the “Purāṇa Saṁhitā” from tales (*ākhyānas*), episodes (*upākhyānas*), verses (*gāthās*), and accounts of the *kalpas*.<sup>94</sup> When Vyāsa taught the four Vedic Saṁhitās to four of his disciples, respectively, he taught this Purāṇa Saṁhitā to his fifth disciple, Sūta Lomahaṛṣaṇa (or Romahaṛṣaṇa). Lomahaṛṣaṇa in turn taught it to his six disciples, three of whom compiled their own Saṁhitās. These three Saṁhitās, together with that of Lomahaṛṣaṇa, constitute the original (*mūla* or *pūrva*) Saṁhitās from which the eighteen Purāṇas were derived.<sup>95</sup> The Vedic paradigm is clearly evident in these accounts of Vyāsa’s role in compiling, dividing, and disseminating the Purāṇa Saṁhitā as the fifth Veda alongside the four Vedic Saṁhitās.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, following the example of earlier Purāṇas, invokes the Vedic model in its accounts of the primordial origins of the Purāṇas and of Vyāsa’s role in transmitting the texts. It does not, however, mention the Purāṇic tradition concerning the primordial Purāṇa that first emerges from the creator Brahmā, after which the Vedas issue forth from his mouths. Instead the Bhāgavata provides an alternative account in which the order of precedence is reversed: the four Vedas issue forth, respectively, from the four mouths of Brahmā, after which the Itihāsas and Purāṇas, as the fifth Veda, emerge from all four mouths together.

From his eastern and other mouths he brought forth in succession the Vedas known as Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva. . . . Then the all-seeing lord

[Brahmā] sent forth from all his mouths together the Itihāsas and Purāṇas as the fifth Veda.<sup>96</sup>

While chronological precedence is thus ascribed to the Vedas, the ontological precedence of the Purāṇas is implied by the image of Brahmā sending forth the fifth Veda from all four of his mouths simultaneously, in contrast to the emergence of each of the four Vedas from only one of his mouths.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa also includes a number of traditions that emphasize the role of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa in dividing the one Veda into four Saṁhitās in Dvāpara Yuga and in transmitting the four Vedas along with the fifth Veda—Itihāsas and Purāṇas—to his disciples.<sup>97</sup> One account emphasizes the parallels in the process of transmission of the Vedas and the Purāṇas and in this context includes a variant of the Purāṇic tradition concerning the Purāṇa Saṁhitās. Just as Vyāsa divided the one Veda into four Saṁhitās, which he transmitted to his four main disciples and their respective lineages, so he taught the Purāṇas, as the fifth Veda, to his fifth disciple, Romaharṣaṇa, who in turn transmitted four original (*mūla*) Purāṇa Saṁhitās to his disciples.<sup>98</sup> The account concludes with a discussion of the ten characteristics, *daśa-lakṣaṇa*, that distinguish a Purāṇa, followed by an enumeration of the eighteen Purāṇas that display these characteristics.<sup>99</sup>

### Purāṇas as Accessible Vedas

While in their claims to primordial origins the Purāṇas emulate the paradigmatic Veda, in their earthly status, as concrete texts transmitted in oral and written form, they diverge from the model of the Vedic Saṁhitās by serving as what we might term “accessible Vedas.”

The “Purāṇa-Vedas” assume the role of accessible Vedas in two interrelated senses: first, they provide a socially inclusive model of scripture that is accessible to people at all levels of the socioreligious hierarchy; and, second, they make the meaning of the Vedas accessible by interpreting and elaborating the Vedic teachings in terms that can be understood by the general populace. In contrast to the Vedic Saṁhitās, which are socially circumscribed scriptures, restricted to male members of the three higher social classes (*varṇas*), the Purāṇas are socially inclusive scriptures, intended for people of all social classes, including *śūdras* (servants) and women. The Purāṇas represent themselves as the Veda of the general populace, complementing and supplementing the Vedic Saṁhitās by incorporating

popular devotional teachings alongside traditional Vedic teachings.

The Purāṇas declare themselves the repositories of efficacious *mantras*, comparable in power to the Vedic *mantras*, and regularly proclaim the fruits of reciting a Purāṇa as well as the fruits of hearing (*phala-śruti*) such recitations. In their perspectives on recitation the Purāṇas depart from the Vedic model in significant ways. For example, whereas the Vedic Saṃhitās may be recited and heard only by male members of the three higher *varṇas*, Purāṇic recitations are intended for the general populace and are therefore open to *śūdras* and women. In addition, the Purāṇas emphasize not only the power of *mantra*, but the power of sacred narrative as well. In contrast to recitations of the Vedic Saṃhitās, which focus almost exclusively on *śabda*, on verbatim reproduction of the Vedic sounds, in Purāṇic recitations both *śabda* and *artha*, sound and meaning, are important, for the content of the texts is intended to convey important teachings to the general populace. As Thomas Coburn has emphasized, the Purāṇas exemplify the “didactic” function of *smṛti* texts, which are intended above all to convey meaning to an audience, in contrast to the “sacramental” function of *śruti* texts, the sounds of which must be accurately reproduced irrespective of whether their discursive meaning is understood.<sup>100</sup>

This shift in emphasis from sound to meaning in the Purāṇic tradition is accompanied by a shift in modes of scriptural transmission, in which the Purāṇas depart from the Vedic paradigm of exclusively oral transmission by emphasizing the importance of written transmission as well. They declare the fruits not only of hearing a Purāṇa recited but also of writing or copying the text itself and then of giving the book away as a gift. The giving of gifts, including the giving of books, is in principle open to everyone, and thus this Purāṇic practice, like that of Purāṇic recitation, serves to consolidate the Purāṇas’ claims to be the Veda of the general populace.<sup>101</sup>

### Bhāgavata Purāṇa as the Culmination of Śruti and Smṛti

Beyond making claims regarding the Vedic status of the Purāṇas generally, each of the Purāṇas is also concerned to set itself apart as the preeminent Purāṇa that most perfectly embodies Veda. In this context the Purāṇas, in addition to delineating the characteristics that are shared by all members of the Purāṇic canon, also employ taxonomies to differentiate and classify the various Purāṇas according to specific criteria. These taxonomies are at times invoked to hierarchize the members of the Purāṇic canon and to

establish the preeminence of a particular Purāṇa within the hierarchy.

One of the principal modes of classifying the Purāṇas pertains to the deity who—in accordance with the sectarian emphasis of the particular Purāṇa—is identified with Brahman and revered as the supreme Godhead. According to this criterion, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which celebrate Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa as the supreme Godhead, are classified as Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas; the Śiva Purāṇa and Liṅga Purāṇa, which revere Śiva as the ultimate reality, are classified as Śaiva Purāṇas; and the Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which proclaims Devī to be the highest Godhead, is classified as a Śākta Purāṇa. Cross-sectarian Purāṇas that contain both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva material—such as the Matsya and Kūrma Purāṇas—and nonsectarian Purāṇas—such as the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa—prove difficult to classify in this type of taxonomic schema.

A second mode of classification involves correlating the various Purāṇas with the three *guṇas*, the three constituents of *prakṛti* (primordial matter)—*sattva* (purity), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (inertia). The Padma Purāṇa, for example, classifies the Purāṇas according to this criterion, declaring that the Viṣṇu, Nārada, Bhāgavata, Garuḍa, Padma, and Varāha Purāṇas are dominated by *sattva*; the Brahmāṇḍa, Brahmaparivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Bhaviṣya, Vāmana, and Brahma Purāṇas, by *rajas*; and the Matsya, Kūrma, Liṅga, Śiva, Skanda, and Agni Purāṇas, by *tamas*.<sup>102</sup> The three great gods of the *trimūrti*—Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Śiva—are represented in the Purāṇas as presiding over the domains of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, respectively, and thus the two modes of classification—deity worshiped and *guṇas*—are at times combined in a single taxonomy. The Matsya Purāṇa provides an example of this type of hybrid taxonomy:

The *sāttvic* Purāṇas primarily glorify Hari [Viṣṇu]; the *rājasic* Purāṇas primarily glorify Brahmā; and the *tāmasic* Purāṇas glorify Śiva and Agni. Those Purāṇas with a mixture of *guṇas* proclaim the glory of Sarasvatī and of the *pitṛs* (ancestors).<sup>103</sup>

While Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas may revel in their ascribed status as the most *sāttvic*—the most pure and luminous—of all the Purāṇas, at the same time they insist that this *sāttvic* status is itself secondary. Rather, their primary claim to supremacy is that Viṣṇu—the deity whom they glorify—is the supreme Godhead who is identical with Brahman and who is the source of Brahmā, Śiva, Devī, and all the other deities. Śaiva Purāṇas and Śākta Purāṇas make comparable claims about the supreme status of their respective deities—Śiva and Devī.

It is above all in this arena of divine power plays that the sectarian Purāṇas vie for hegemony in their contending claims to be the preeminent "Purāṇa-Veda." The Śiva Purāṇa, for example, declares that, as the "ocean of knowledge of Śiva" (*Śiva-jñānāmaya*), it is equal to the Veda (*veda-samīta*),<sup>104</sup> the essence of the Veda (*veda-sāra*),<sup>105</sup> and the essence of the entire Upaniṣads (*vedānta-sāra-sarvasva*).<sup>106</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa—using almost identical terms—similarly proclaims that, as the "*śruti* pertaining to Kṛṣṇa" (*sātvatī śruti*),<sup>107</sup> it is equal to the Veda (*brahma-sammita*, *veda-sammita*),<sup>108</sup> the essence of the entire *śruti* (*akhila-śruti-sāra*),<sup>109</sup> and the essence of all the Upaniṣads (*sarva-vedānta-sāra*).<sup>110</sup> The Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa declares that, as the "Purāṇa pertaining to Durgā" (Daurga Purāṇa),<sup>111</sup> it is the essence of the Veda (*veda-sāra*)<sup>112</sup> and conveys the secret teachings of the Veda (*nigama-guhya*).<sup>113</sup>

As discussed earlier, one of the strategies used by the Purāṇas to invest their respective teachings with Vedic authority involves asserting the identity of their respective deities with the Veda, which is represented as the inner essence and the outer form of the supreme Godhead who is revered as Brahman. The identification of the personal God who is the object of devotion with the Upaniṣadic Brahman and with the eternal reality of Veda is one of the essential mechanisms through which the popular devotional teachings of the Purāṇas attained legitimacy as part of the normative brahmanical tradition. However, even more than the other Purāṇas, the Bhāgavata is confronted with a significant problem in connecting itself with the Veda: Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Godhead who is the focus of the text's devotional teachings, is not mentioned in the Vedic Saṁhitās. Although Kṛṣṇa is identified in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa with Viṣṇu—who does appear as a minor deity in the Vedic Saṁhitās—it is as Kṛṣṇa, not Viṣṇu, that he is above all celebrated as Bhagavān, the supreme Lord. The Bhāgavata proclaims that "Kṛṣṇa is Bhagavān himself (*bhagavān svayam*)"<sup>114</sup>—and yet nowhere in the Vedic Saṁhitās is a deity named Kṛṣṇa mentioned.<sup>115</sup> Frederick Smith remarks:

[R]arely is any single Purāṇic deity so estimably beyond the boundaries of Vedic discourse than is Kṛṣṇa. . . . It is well known that Śiva, as Rudra, as well as the Goddess reside at the peripheries of Vedic mythology and ritual; more central is Viṣṇu. But nowhere in the Vedas is Kṛṣṇa mentioned, at least in any form that could predict his future course on the subcontinent.<sup>116</sup>

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa seeks to overcome this problem by vedacizing the text and its teachings in a number of ways.

### Vedacizing the Bhāgavata Purāṇa

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa makes use of a variety of vedacizing strategies—in terms of its language, content, and self-representations—to invest itself with the transcendent authority of the Veda.

In terms of language, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa regularly makes use of Vedic archaisms, employing Vedic grammatical forms and vocabulary, in an attempt to imitate the language of the Vedas.<sup>117</sup> J. A. B. van Buitenen interprets the Bhāgavata's use of Vedic archaisms as an attempt to Sanskritize and legitimate Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* by establishing itself as an orthodox scripture suffused with the power of the Vedic *mantras*: "I am not only orthodox in the Vedic tradition, I even sound like the Veda."<sup>118</sup> In terms of content, Vedic material is incorporated throughout the text, with the exception of Book 10, which celebrates the life of Kṛṣṇa. Smith notes that "the Purāṇa, taken as a whole, is saturated with references to Vedic deities, sages, rituals, and myths."<sup>119</sup>

In terms of self-representations, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa adopts the common Purāṇic strategy of simply asserting its identity and equality with the Veda. However, in order to substantiate its claims to Vedic status it must overcome the problem posed by the Vedic Saṁhitās' lack of mention of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Godhead who is the focus of its teachings. The Bhāgavata addresses this problem by representing Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of Veda and the source and abode of the Vedic *mantras*. Moreover, as we shall see, it goes further and claims for itself the special status of the "Kārṣṇa-Veda" that is the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa (*bhagavad-rūpa*) and that is therefore, by extension, the embodiment of Veda.

In making use of each of these vedacizing strategies, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is concerned to establish its transcendent authority as the preeminent Purāṇa-Veda that, in its special status as the Kārṣṇa-Veda, is the culminating scripture of the entire brahmanical canon of *śruti* and *smṛti* texts.

### Bhāgavata Purāṇa as the Culminating Scripture of the Brahmanical Canon

In support of its claims to be the culminating scripture of the brahmanical canon, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa must establish its paramount status among the Purāṇas, among the *smṛti* texts generally, and among the *śruti*, or Vedic, texts.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa unabashedly declares its unsurpassed status among the Purāṇas:

The other Purāṇas shine forth in the assembly of the righteous only as long



as the supreme Śrīmad Bhāgavata is not directly beheld. The glorious Bhāgavata is acknowledged to be the essence of all the Upaniṣads (*sarva-vedānta-sāra*). One who is satiated with the taste of its nectar (*rasa-amṛta*) does not find delight anywhere else. Its position among the Purāṇas is comparable to that of the Gaṅgā among the rivers, Acyuta (Kṛṣṇa) among the gods, and Śiva among the Vaiṣṇavas. O brahmins, as Kāśī (Benares) is unsurpassed among all the sacred places, so the Śrīmad Bhāgavata is unsurpassed among all the Purāṇas.<sup>120</sup>

In order to consolidate its authority among the *smṛti* texts generally, the Bhāgavata must establish its preeminence not only among the Purāṇas but also among the second major category of *smṛti* texts with which the Purāṇas are closely associated: the Itihāsas. The Bhāgavata does so by asserting that it is the “very essence (*sāra*) extracted from all the Itihāsas and Vedas.”<sup>121</sup>

In both of these statements—concerning its superior status among the Purāṇas and Itihāsas, respectively—the Bhāgavata Purāṇa invokes the authority of the Vedas as one of the means of establishing its superiority: the Bhāgavata is superior to the other Purāṇas in part because of its special status as the essence of all the Upaniṣads (*sarva-vedānta-sāra*);<sup>122</sup> it is superior to the Itihāsas because it is not only the essence (*sāra*) of the Itihāsas but also that of the Vedas. The Bhāgavata reserves for itself the special status of the *purāṇa-guhyā*, the Purāṇa that contains the deepest mysteries, because it alone is the concentrated essence of the entire *śruti* literature (*akhila-śruti-sāra*)—not only the Upaniṣads, but also the Saṁhitās, Brāhmaṇas, and Āraṇyakas.<sup>123</sup> This *śruti* pertaining to Kṛṣṇa<sup>124</sup> also proclaims itself the fruit (*phala*) of the wish-yielding tree of Veda (*nigama-kalpa-taru*)<sup>125</sup> and ultimately asserts that it is equal to the Veda (*brahma-sammīta, veda-sammīta*).<sup>126</sup> Finally, the Bhāgavata goes even further and declares itself the quintessential scripture that represents the concentrated essence (*sāra*) of all the sacred texts—*śruti* and *smṛti*.<sup>127</sup>

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa seeks to substantiate its claims to be the quintessential scripture of the entire brahmanical canon by representing itself as the culminating achievement of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa’s life. In this context, in addition to its accounts of the origins of the Purāṇas that we discussed earlier, the Bhāgavata provides a separate account of its own unique origins. The account emphasizes how Vyāsa, after dividing the one Veda into four, composing the Mahābhārata, and compiling the other seventeen Mahāpurāṇas, was not satisfied. Even though he had accomplished these great literary feats, had mastered the Vedas, and had attained realization of Brahman, he did not feel fulfilled. While Vyāsa was lamenting his lack of



fulfillment, the divine ṛṣi Nārada approached him and explained to him that although he had attained mastery of all knowledge and had realized the truth of existence, his heart was not satisfied because he had not yet sung the praises of Kṛṣṇa and extolled the glories of devotion to Bhagavān.<sup>128</sup> Thus inspired by Nārada, Vyāsa returned to his hermitage and sat down and meditated, and “in his mind, freed of impurity by *bhakti-yoga* and completely collected, he saw (root *dṛś*) the primordial Puruṣa.”<sup>129</sup> He then composed the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as a record of his cognitions of Kṛṣṇa, in which his heart overflowed in blissful celebration of the play, or *līlā*, of the supreme Bhagavān and of the path of *bhakti* through which he is realized.<sup>130</sup>

### Bhāgavata Purāṇa as Kārṣṇa-Veda

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, as the Kārṣṇa-Veda, celebrates Kṛṣṇa as the supreme Godhead, Bhagavān, who is identical with Brahman and Veda incarnate. As mentioned earlier, by identifying Kṛṣṇa with the Veda, the Bhāgavata overcomes the problem posed by the lack of reference to Kṛṣṇa in the Vedic Saṁhitās: Kṛṣṇa is not mentioned in the Vedas because he himself *is* the Veda on an ontological level. Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate reality who is celebrated in the Upaniṣads as Brahman, whose inner essence is Veda, knowledge, and whose outer form is constituted by the Vedic *mantras*. His Self is the threefold Veda (*trayī-vidyātman*),<sup>131</sup> his very substance is Veda (*sarva-veda-maya*),<sup>132</sup> and his body is composed of the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, *sāmans*, and *atharvans*.<sup>133</sup> Realization of the supreme reality of Kṛṣṇa, which is the goal of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa’s devotional teachings, is understood in this context to be tantamount to realization of the eternal Veda.

Kṛṣṇa is extolled in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa not only as the embodiment of Veda but also as the means through which the Vedic *mantras* are manifested on earth in every cycle of creation. He is celebrated as the ultimate source of the tradition of Vedic transmission and is also identified with each of the three principal agents in the transmission process that we discussed earlier: the creator Brahṁā, the Vedic ṛṣis, and Vyāsa.<sup>134</sup> Brahṁā, as we have seen, is the first agent in the process of transmission, who brings forth the Vedic *mantras* from his four mouths at the beginning of each cycle of creation.<sup>135</sup> The second link in the process of transmission consists of the Vedic ṛṣis, who “see” (root *dṛś*) and preserve the Vedic *mantras*, establishing the tradition of recitative transmission through which the *mantras* are passed down generation after generation.<sup>136</sup> The third principal agent

in the process of Vedic transmission is the great ṛṣi Vyāsa, who in Dvāpara Yuga divides the Veda into four Saṁhitās to facilitate its preservation and understanding.<sup>137</sup>

The opening verse of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa proclaims that it is Kṛṣṇa himself, as the supreme Bhagavān, who reveals the Veda to Brahmā, the first seer (*ādi-kavi*).<sup>138</sup> After the Veda disappears during the cosmic dissolution at the end of each cycle of creation, it is he who transmits it to Brahmā at the beginning of the next creation. Kṛṣṇa himself declares:

In the course of time this Word (*vāṇī*) known as Veda disappeared during the dissolution (*pralaya*). At the beginning [of the next creation] I imparted to Brahmā this [Word, Veda], in which resides the *dharma* of devoting oneself to Me.<sup>139</sup>

Kṛṣṇa's transmission of the Veda to Brahmā is represented by the Bhāgavata as a process of self-disclosure, for he himself is the eternal reality of Veda. The Veda finds differentiated expression in the Vedic *mantras*, which issue forth as the impulses of primordial speech from Brahmā's mouths and are preserved by the ṛṣis and their lineages as recited texts. The Vedic texts preserved through recitative transmission are the precipitated expressions of the eternal Veda, Kṛṣṇa, and thus their true purpose is to reveal the manifest and unmanifest forms of the supreme Bhagavān and to teach the *dharma* of devotion to him.<sup>140</sup>

The creator Brahmā is described in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as the manifest form that Kṛṣṇa assumes at the beginning of each *kalpa* in order to bring forth the worlds and animate and inanimate beings. He thus participates in Kṛṣṇa's nature as Veda incarnate and is correspondingly said to be composed of Veda (*veda-maya*)<sup>141</sup> and the abode of Veda (*veda-garbha*).<sup>142</sup> When he embarks on his role as demiurge, Brahmā brings forth the Vedic *mantras* from his four mouths, and it is through his utterance of the Vedic words that the manifold phenomena of creation are projected into concrete manifestation. As he proceeds with his cosmogonic activities, Brahmā extols the glories of Bhagavān, whose creative powers he embodies, and beseeches him not to allow his utterance of the Vedic words to fail.<sup>143</sup>

Kṛṣṇa, the embodiment of Veda, is thus represented in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as assuming the form of Brahmā in order to bring forth the Vedic *mantras* and to manifest the phenomenal world. In the second phase of the process of Vedic transmission, he is represented as assuming the form of

the *ṛṣi* (*ṛṣi-rūpa-dhara*) to cognize and preserve the Vedic *mantras* and thereby inaugurate the recitative and sacrificial traditions.<sup>144</sup> Finally, in the third phase of the transmission process, he assumes the form of the *ṛṣi* Vyāsa in Dvāpara Yuga in order to divide the one Veda into four Saṁhitās.<sup>145</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa thus represents Kṛṣṇa as assuming a series of manifest forms in order to bring forth the Vedic *mantras*, cognize and preserve them as recited texts, and divide them into distinct collections. The entire process is ultimately understood as a process of self-revelation, for the Vedic *mantras* that he brings forth, cognizes, and divides are simply the differentiated expressions of his own eternal nature as Veda.

This process of self-revelation culminates in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which Kṛṣṇa reveals to himself in the form of the demiurge Brahmā at the beginning of each *kalpa*.<sup>146</sup> Brahmā in turn transmits the Bhāgavata to his son Nārada, who in turn imparts it to the *ṛṣi* Vyāsa when he is meditating.<sup>147</sup> It is through the agency of his partial incarnation, Vyāsa,<sup>148</sup> that Kṛṣṇa gives manifest expression to the Bhāgavata in the form of a concrete text. Kṛṣṇa is both the *ṛṣi* Vyāsa and the object of this great *ṛṣi*'s cognitions. Kṛṣṇa reveals himself as Kṛṣṇa to himself as Vyāsa in the form of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, in which he celebrates the rapturous delights of his own divine play, *līlā*. While from the perspective of Kṛṣṇa, the Bhāgavata's narration of the *līlā* (*līlā-kathā*) is self-revelation, from the perspective of the enlightened sage Vyāsa, it is a record of his cognitions of the supreme Bhagavān.

Vyāsa's cognitions of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* are represented as the culminating stage of spiritual attainment, for even though he has realized Brahman he does not feel completely fulfilled until he realizes the supreme reality of Kṛṣṇa and extols the glories of Bhagavān. In this highest state, with his consciousness immersed in Kṛṣṇa, he cognizes the hidden dynamics of the Godhead and witnesses the unfoldment of Kṛṣṇa's cosmic dance. Like the Vedic *ṛṣi*, who cognize the activities of the gods in their celestial realms and give expression to their cognitions in the form of recited hymns, the *ṛṣi* Vyāsa cognizes the play and display of the supreme Bhagavān and gives expression to his cognition in the form of recited narratives. Recitation of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* (*līlā-kathā*) is therefore understood to be tantamount to recitation of the Vedic *mantras*.<sup>149</sup>

The Bhāgavata declares itself equal to the Veda because Kṛṣṇa, who is Veda incarnate, discloses himself most perfectly and completely in this text. The Bhāgavata thus claims for itself the special status of the Kārṣṇa-Veda, which can be understood in two senses: as the Veda whose semantic con-

tent pertains to Kṛṣṇa; and as the Veda that is identical with Kṛṣṇa, in the sense that the text itself is the concrete embodiment of Bhagavān (*bhagavad-rūpa*).<sup>150</sup> Kṛṣṇa, who is Veda incarnate, is embodied in the Bhāgavata, which is therefore Kṛṣṇa incarnate and, by extension, Veda incarnate. In the final analysis, then, the Bhāgavata's declarations that it is *brahma-sammita*<sup>151</sup> are assertions of its identity with that totality which is simultaneously Brahman, Kṛṣṇa, and Veda. The Bhāgavata, as Śabdabrahman and *bhagavad-rūpa* and *śruti* incarnate, is Brahman embodied in the Word, Kṛṣṇa embodied in sound. This Kārṣṇa-Veda Saṁhitā—this collection of recited narratives about Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*—is considered the consummate expression on the manifest level of the eternal reverberations that constitute Kṛṣṇa's transcendent form on the unmanifest level. At the onset of Kali Yuga, when Kṛṣṇa departs the earth and returns to his transcendent, unmanifest abode (*dhāman*), he leaves behind the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as his manifest form that serves as the "embodiment of Bhagavān (*bhagavad-rūpa*) in Kali Yuga."<sup>152</sup>

This Purāṇa known by the name of Bhāgavata is equal to Brahman/Kṛṣṇa/Veda (*brahma-sammita*). . . . This [Bhāgavata] is the very essence (*sāra*) extracted from all the Itihāsas and Vedas. . . . Now that Kṛṣṇa has departed for his own abode (*svadhāman*) along with *dharma*, knowledge, and so on, this Purāṇa has risen like the sun for the sake of those who are bereft of sight in Kali Yuga.<sup>153</sup>

The text of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa—not only in its audible manifestation as recited narratives but also in its visible manifestation as a concrete book—is thus revered as a "text-incarnation" of Kṛṣṇa, which like his "image-incarnations" (*arcāvatāras*), is to be "placed on a throne of gold" and worshiped accordingly.<sup>154</sup>

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa emphasizes the fruits of reciting this *śruti* pertaining to Kṛṣṇa,<sup>155</sup> as well as the fruits of hearing (*phala-śruti*) the recitation.<sup>156</sup> A brahmin who recites the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is said to attain fruits comparable to those attained through reciting the Vedic *mantras*.<sup>157</sup> However, like other Purāṇas, the Bhāgavata also distinguishes itself from the Vedic paradigm by insisting that—in contrast to the Vedic *mantras*, which may be recited and heard only by male members of the three higher social classes—this Purāṇa-Veda may be recited and heard by people at all levels of the socioreligious hierarchy, including *sūdras* and women.<sup>158</sup> The Bhāgavata, the fruit of the wish-yielding tree of Veda, declares itself to be full of bliss-bestowing ambrosia (*amṛta, rasa*) in the form of stories of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*

(*līlā-kathā*), which are savored and enjoyed by all who hear them and which captivate the hearts of gods and humans alike.<sup>159</sup> Reciting the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and listening to its recitation are celebrated as a means through which the devotee may purify his or her heart and mind of all sin,<sup>160</sup> attain freedom from suffering and ignorance,<sup>161</sup> and cross over the ocean of *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, to a state of liberation from bondage (*bandha-muktī*).<sup>162</sup> Through recounting the glorious deeds of Kṛṣṇa and describing in vivid, sensuous detail his love-play with the *gopīs*, recitation of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is intended above all to inspire *bhakti* in the hearts of the listeners<sup>163</sup> and to culminate in the attainment of the highest goal of human existence: realization of the supreme reality of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>164</sup>

Vyāsa, having realized the supreme reality of Bhagavān, recorded his cognitions of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* and extolled the glories of *bhakti* as the means to attain the sublime state of realization in which one awakens to the cosmic dance of Kṛṣṇa. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa declares, moreover, that devotion to Kṛṣṇa is the most efficacious means of realizing the true import of the Vedas, for Kṛṣṇa himself is the eternal Veda who manifests himself in the differentiated expressions of the Vedic *mantras*. The personified Vedas are depicted as singing a hymn of praise (*veda-stuti*) to Kṛṣṇa as the supreme Godhead who is their source and goal.<sup>165</sup> The entire canon of *śruti* and *smṛti* texts—the Vedas together with the Vedāṅgas, Upavedas, Itihāsas, and Purāṇas—is portrayed as bowing down at the feet of Bhagavān.<sup>166</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, as the Kārṣṇa-Veda, the embodiment of Bhagavān, thus claims for itself the status of the quintessential scripture that is the culmination and fulfillment of the entire brahmanical canon.

#### ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used in the notes to this article.

Agni = Agni Purāṇa

AV = Atharva-Veda Samhitā

BAU = Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad

BP = Bhāgavata Purāṇa

Brahm. = Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa

CU = Chāndogya Upaniṣad

Devī = Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa

KP = Kūrma Purāṇa

LP = Liṅga Purāṇa

Maitrī = Maitrī Upaniṣad

Mār. = Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa  
 Mbh. = Mahābhārata  
 MP = Matsya Purāṇa  
 MS = Manu-Smṛti  
 Nār. = Nārada Purāṇa  
 Padma = Padma Purāṇa  
 Rām. = Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa  
 ŚB = Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa  
 Skanda = Skanda Purāṇa  
 ŚP = Śiva Purāṇa  
 Vāyu = Vāyu Purāṇa  
 VP = Viṣṇu Purāṇa

1. For a summary of scholarly opinions concerning the date of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, see Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 147-148; Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 486-488, with n. 10; and Edwin F. Bryant, "The Date and Provenance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Vaiṣṇa Perumāl Temple," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 51-80. One of the dominant scholarly perspectives, articulated by Hardy and many others, dates the Bhāgavata to the ninth or tenth century. This perspective has been challenged recently by Bryant, who invokes Dennis Hudson's study of the Vaiṣṇa Perumāl Temple in Kāñcīpuram to establish the eighth century as the new upper limit for the date of the Bhāgavata. See Bryant, "The Date and Provenance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," 61-62; Dennis Hudson, "The Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Stone: The Text as an Eighth-Century Temple and Its Implications," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 3, no. 3 (1995): 137-182. With respect to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa's place of origin, the scholarly consensus is that it originated in the Tamil region of South India. For a summary of the evidence for the text's South Indian origin, see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 488, 637-646. See also Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, 148; C. V. Vaidya, "The Date of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s., 1 (1925): 156-158; A. Ray, "Domicile of the Author of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 8 (1932): 49-53; Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The Lord of the Autumn Moons* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1957), 72-74; Thomas J. Hopkins, "The Social Teaching of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," in Milton Singer, ed., *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 4-6; T. S. Rukmani, *A Critical Study of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa (with Special Reference to Bhakti)* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1970), 9-11; and Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, trans., *The Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), xl. For a refutation of a number of the arguments in support of the South Indian provenance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, see Bryant, "The Date and Provenance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," 63-67.

2. In his extended study of Kṛṣṇa devotion in South India, Friedhelm Hardy emphasizes the importance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa's role in Sanskritizing the Tamil *bhakti* of the Ālvārs and attempting to integrate North and South Indian traditions. He remarks: "Northern culture orientated itself by a social system (the brahmins as the foremost *varṇa* [social class]) and an ideology (the Vedānta, viz. the systematization of the teaching of the Upaniṣads), while Southern culture was characterized by an emotional religion (of the Ālvārs) and by great aesthetic sensibility (the old *caṅkam* poetry, and the *akattiṇai*). The BhP [Bhāgavata Purāṇa] tries to integrate all four complexes, and it uses the symbol of the Vedas to achieve this, while adopting the purāṇic literary form" (Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 489).

3. Ibid.

4. For extended studies of the role of *bhakti* in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*; Rukmani, *A Critical Study of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa (with Special Reference to Bhakti)*; and Adalbert Gail, *Bhakti im Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Religionsgeschichtliche Studie zur Idee der Gottesliebe in Kult und Mystik des Viṣṇuismus* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1969).

5. For an enumeration of representative commentaries on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, see Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, 149; Tagare, trans., *The Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*, pt. 1, lxvi-lxix.

6. Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, esp. 36-43, 573.

7. This term derives from Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

8. The earliest references to the Veda(s) in Vedic texts generally focus on the triad *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans*, which are designated as the "threefold knowledge" (*trayī vidyā*) or the "threefold Veda" (*traya veda*). This emphasis on the "threefold knowledge" of the Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Sāma-Veda suggests that it took some time before the *atharvans* of the Atharva-Veda were accorded an equivalent status as forming part of the "four Vedas" (*catur veda*).

9. The term *mantra* is used in the present context to refer to the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, *sāmans*, and *atharvans* collected in the four Saṁhitās, as distinct from the Brāhmaṇa and Upaniṣadic portions of the Veda. It should be noted, however, that although the terms *mantra* and Saṁhitā are often used interchangeably, they are not entirely synonymous, as the Taittiriya Saṁhitā (Black Yajur-Veda) contains, in addition to *mantras*, some Brāhmaṇa material discussing the sacrificial ceremonies.

10. Although the canon of *śruti* is technically closed, the category of Upaniṣads has remained somewhat permeable, with new Upaniṣads being added to the traditionally accepted 108 Upaniṣads until as late as the medieval period. Many of the later Upaniṣads are highly sectarian, and thus this phenomenon represents one of the strategies used by sectarian movements to legitimate their own texts through granting them the nominal status of *śruti*.

11. See Thomas Coburn's illuminating discussion of the relationship between *śruti* and *smṛti* in "Scripture' in India: Towards a Typology of the Word in Hindu Life,"

*Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 3 (1984): 435-459; reprinted in Miriam Levering, ed., *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 102-128.

12. See, for example, Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat, *L'Inde classique. Manuel des études indiennes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Payot, 1947-1949), 381, 270; Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), xix; R. N. Dandekar, "Dharma, The First End of Man," in Wm. Theodore de Bary, et al., eds., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 217; Jan Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens*, vol. 1, *Veda und alterer Hinduismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960), 107; A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the History and Culture of the Indian Sub-continent before the Coming of the Muslims*, 3d rev. ed. (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1967), 112-113; and Oscar Botto, "Letterature antiche dell'India," in Oscar Botto, ed., *Storia delle Letterature d'Oriente*, vol. 3 (Milan: Casa Editrice Dr. Francesco Vallardi, Societa Editrice Libreria, 1969), 294. For a discussion and critique of such characterizations of *śruti* and *smṛti* as a distinction between "revelation" and "tradition," see Sheldon Pollock, "'Tradition' as 'Revelation': *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, and the Sanskrit Discourse of Power," in Siegfried Lienhard and Irma Piovano, eds., *Lex et Litterae: Essays on Ancient Indian Law and Literature in Honour of Oscar Botto* (Turin: CESMEO). Pollock's views are discussed in n. 17.

13. In opposition to the view of the Mīmāṃsakas and Vedāntins that the Vedas are eternal and *apauruṣeya*, the exponents of the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Yoga schools use a variety of arguments to establish that the Vedas are noneternal (*anitya*) and *pauruṣeya*, created by the agency of a personal God, Īśvara.

14. J. C. Heesterman, "Veda and Dharma," in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and J. Duncan M. Derrett, eds., *The Concept of Duty in South Asia* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), 92-93. For a survey of the different attitudes, beliefs, and practices that the major texts, philosophical schools, and sects of the Indian tradition have adopted with respect to the Veda in the course of its history, see Louis Renou, *The Destiny of the Veda in India*, trans. Dev Raj Chanana (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965). See also Wilhelm Halbfass's discussion of the role and significance of the Veda in traditional Hindu self-understanding in his *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), esp. 1-22. For a recent collection of essays on the role of Vedic authority in various Indian religious traditions, which challenges a number of Renou's conclusions, see Laurie L. Patton, ed., *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

15. For a detailed analysis of the cosmogonic and epistemological paradigms associated with the Veda in Vedic and post-Vedic texts, see Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

16. See, for example, Mbh. 1.57.74; Mbh. 12.327.18; Rām. 1.1.77; BP 1.4.20; BP



3.12.39; Skanda 5.3.1.18. For a discussion of the Mahābhārata's representations of itself as the fifth Veda, see James L. Fitzgerald, "India's Fifth Veda: The Mahābhārata's Presentation of Itself," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 20, no. 1 (1985): 125-140; and Fitzgerald, "The Veda in the 'Fifth Veda' of Vyāsa's Mahābhārata" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Orleans, 1996). For an analysis of how the Mahābhārata's depiction of the sage Vyāsa serves to legitimate its claim to be the fifth Veda, see Bruce M. Sullivan, *Kṛṣṇa Dvāipāyana Vyāsa and the Mahābhārata: A New Interpretation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), esp. 29-31, 81-101, 112-117. The strategies used by the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other Purāṇas to establish their Vedic status will be discussed later.

17. Sheldon Pollock has brought to light an essential mechanism whereby the domain of the Veda was extended to include not only *śruti* but also *smṛti*. He locates this mechanism in the definition of the terms *śruti* and *smṛti* themselves, which, he argues, have been incorrectly construed as representing a dichotomy between "revelation" and "tradition." He maintains rather that, according to the etymology derived from the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā school that is still prevalent among certain traditional brahmanical teachers, *śruti* refers to the extant Vedic texts that can be "heard" in recitation, whereas *smṛti* is an open-ended category that encompasses any teachings or practices pertaining to *dharma* that have been "remembered" from lost Vedic texts. The term Veda is thus extended through a process of "vedacization" and comes to include not only *śruti* but also *smṛti* texts. See Pollock, "'Tradition' as 'Revelation'"; and Pollock, "From Discourse of Ritual to Discourse of Power in Sanskrit Culture," in Barbara A. Holdrege, ed., *Ritual and Power, Journal of Ritual Studies* 4, no. 2 (1990): 322-328. David Carpenter has argued that the extension of the purview of Veda beyond the ritual practices delineated in the *śruti* texts to the broader domain of sociocultural practices laid out in *smṛti* texts was accomplished primarily by shifting the locus of Vedic authority from a circumscribed set of "texts" to the brahmanical custodians who were responsible for the "ritualized reproduction of the 'divine speech' of the Vedic tradition." In the Dharma-Sūtras and the Dharma-Śāstras the conduct of the brahmins became synonymous with *śiṣṭācāra*, the "practice of the learned," and was ascribed normative status alongside *śruti* and *smṛti* as an authoritative source of *dharma*. Thus, even when the teachings of the brahmins went beyond the teachings of the *śruti* texts, they were nevertheless deemed "Vedic," for they were promulgated by those who, by virtue of their privileged role as transmitters of the Vedic recitative tradition, had become "living embodiments of the Veda." See David Carpenter, "Language, Ritual, and Society: Reflections on the Authority of the Veda in India," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 1 (1992): 57-77, esp. 58-63. For a discussion of the ways in which the Dharma-Sūtras and the Dharma-Śāstras utilize the theory of the lost Veda, the notion of *śiṣṭācāra*, and other mechanisms to invest *smṛti* teachings concerning *dharma* with the authority of Veda, see Barbara A. Holdrege, "Dharma," in Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds., *The Hindu World* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 225-228.

18. A number of these modes of assimilation are discussed by Pollock in "From Discourse of Ritual to Discourse of Power in Sanskrit Culture," 332.

19. The mechanisms of vedacization through which specific texts and traditions have sought to invest themselves with Vedic status have been explored in two recent scholarly forums, the symposium "Whose Veda?," held at the University of Florida in Gainesville (1996), and the panel "Whose Veda? Revelation and Authority in South Asian Religions," held at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in New Orleans (1996). For references to the papers presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, see nn. 16, 22-24.

20. See Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-29, esp. 20-29. Smith goes so far as to claim that "the Veda functions as a touchstone for Hindu orthodoxy" and that Vedic authority is constitutive of "Hinduism" itself, including not only the brahmanical tradition but also devotional sects and tantric movements: "Hinduism is the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimizing reference to the authority of the Veda" (26, 13-14). Jan Gonda similarly defines Hinduism as "a complex of social-religious phenomena which are based on the authority of the ancient corpora, called Veda" (Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion* [The Hague: Mouton, 1965], 7). For statements by other Indologists concerning the authority of the Veda as the decisive criterion of Hindu orthodoxy, see Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, 18 n. 45.

21. See N. Subbu Reddiar, "The Nālāyiram as Drāvida Veda," chapter 26 of his *Religion and Philosophy of Nālāyira Divya Prabandham with Special Reference to Nammālvār* (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University, 1977), 680-693; and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation, and Ritual* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).

22. For a discussion of the vedacization of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, and of *Mānas* recitation rituals in particular, see Philip Lutgendorf, "The Power of Sacred Story: Rāmāyaṇa Recitation in Contemporary North India," in Holdrege, ed., *Ritual and Power*, *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4, no. 2 (1990): 115-147. See also Lutgendorf's *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Lutgendorf reflects more generally on the mechanisms of vedacization in "'Vedacization' Revisited" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Orleans, 1996).

23. M. Thomas Thangaraj, "The Veda-Āgama in Tamil Christianity" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Orleans, 1996).

24. Vasudha Narayanan, "The Veda in Tamil Islamic Literature" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Orleans, 1996).

25. For example, the *vacana* poets of the Virāṣaiva sect, which originated in the Kannada-speaking region of South India in the tenth century, were leaders of a protest movement that rejected the Vedic texts and rituals because of their association with the caste system and other brahmanical institutions. See A. K. Ramanujan,

trans., *Speaking of Śiva* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1973), 19-55. Certain left-handed tantric sects such as the Kashmir Śaivas have not only rejected Vedic authority, but they have also treated the Veda as a symbol that is to be actively subverted by adhering to teachings and practices that directly transgress orthodox brahmanical traditions. Abhinavagupta (tenth century), the most famous exponent of Kashmir Śaivism, asserts: "The wise *sādhaka* [tantric practitioner] must not choose the word of the Veda as the ultimate authority because it is full of impurities and produces meager, unstable, and limited results. Rather, the *sādhaka* should elect the Śaivite scriptures as his source. Moreover, that which according to the Veda produces sin leads, according to the left-handed doctrine, promptly to perfection. The entire Vedic teaching is in fact tightly held in the grip of *māyā* (delusional power)" (*Tantrāloka* 37.10-12; cf. 15.595-599). Cited in Paul E. Muller-Ortega, "The Power of the Secret Ritual: Theoretical Formulations from the Tantra," in Holdrege, ed., *Ritual and Power, Journal of Ritual Studies* 4, no. 2 (1990): 49.

26. VP 3.3.30.

27. VP 6.4.42.

28. VP 3.3.22; VP 1.22.81.

29. VP 3.3.29-30.

30. VP 2.22.81-83. See also VP 2.11.7-11, which describes the threefold Veda—*ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans*—as the body (*aṅga*) of Viṣṇu and as identical with his supreme energy (*śakti*) that abides within the sun and is responsible for the preservation of the universe. Cf. Mārķ. 102.15-16, 20-22; Mārķ. 103.6; Mārķ. 104.28.

31. BP 8.16.31.

32. BP 7.11.7; cf. BP 10.16.44.

33. BP 6.16.51. For the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the Veda as Śabdabrahman, see also BP 11.21.36-43.

34. See, for example, BP 7.3.30; BP 1.5.37; BP 5.22.3.

35. BP 3.13.34-44, esp. 34, 41, 44. Similar descriptions of the sacrificial boar as Veda incarnate are found in earlier Purāṇas, as discussed in n. 36.

36. Like the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a number of the Purāṇas extol Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa as Veda incarnate when he assumes the form of a sacrificial boar (*yajña-varāha*), his body composed of the Vedas and sacrifices, to rescue the earth that lies submerged beneath the cosmic waters. See, for example, KP 1.6.15; VP 1.4.9, 21-25, 32-34; MP 248.67-73. Cf. Mārķ. 47.3-9, esp. 8, which depicts the creator Brahmā, not Viṣṇu, as Nārāyaṇa, who assumes the form of a boar composed of the Vedas to save the earth.

37. MP 164.20; MP 167.12.

38. See, for example, ŚP Rudra. 2.15.46, 52, 64. The Śaiva sections of the Kūrma Purāṇa similarly celebrate Śiva as the eternal Brahman whose Self is knowledge (*jñānātman*, *vidyātman*) and who, as the secret essence of the Veda (*veda-rahasya*), is the embodiment of the very self of Veda (*vedātma-mūrti*). See KP 2.3.6, 20; KP 1.10.46-47, 68.

39. ŚP Rudra. 1.8.1-53.

40. VP 4.1.4.
41. KP 1.2.26.
42. KP 1.4.39.
43. KP 1.9.19.
44. BP 3.11.34; BP 3.12.48.
45. BP 3.18.15; BP 3.9.43; cf. BP 2.6.34.
46. BP 3.12.1; BP 3.13.6.
47. BP 3.12.34-35, 37-40, 44-48.
48. VP 1.5.52-55. This account is given in nearly identical words in Mārķ. 48.31-34; KP 1.7.54-57; LP 1.70.243-246; and ŚP Vāyaviya. 1.12.58-62.
49. BP 3.12.34, 37. See also BP 12.6.44.
50. VP 1.5.62-63. This passage appears with slight variations in Mārķ. 48.42-43; KP 1.7.64-65; LP 1.70.257-259; and ŚP Vāyaviya. 1.12.67-69. For parallel passages in the Manu-Smṛti and the Mahābhārata, see MS 1.21 and Mbh. 12.224.56, with n. 672\*.
51. A *mahāyuga* is a cycle of four *yugas*—Kṛta Yuga (1,728,000 years), Tretā Yuga (1,296,000 years), Dvāpara Yuga (864,000 years), and Kali Yuga (432,000 years)—comprising a total of 4,320,000 years. One thousand *mahāyugas* (4,320,000,000 years) constitute a *kalpa*, a single day of the creator Brahmā. Every *kalpa*, or day of Brahmā, is also subdivided into fourteen *manvantaras*, or intervals of Manu, each comprising seventy-one and a fraction *mahāyugas*. At the end of each day (*kalpa*) Brahmā sleeps for a night and a minor dissolution (*pralaya*) occurs, after which Brahmā awakens and initiates a new *pratisarga*, or secondary creation. At the end of Brahmā's lifetime, which consists of one hundred years of Brahmā days and nights, a major dissolution (*mahāpralaya*) occurs, after which the entire cycle begins again with a *sarga*, or primary creation.
52. See, for example, VP 6.4.1-7.
53. VP 3.2.44; cf. Vāyu 61.121-122; BP 8.14.4.
54. BP 1.1.1.
55. See, for example, BP 12.6.44-46. Cf. BP 11.14.3-7; Mārķ. 45.20-23.
56. See, for example, VP 3.3.9-20; VP 3.4.1-5; Vāyu 23.119-218; KP 1.49.47-1.50.10; LP 1.7.11-18; LP 1.24.12-140. Cf. Brahm. 1.2.35.116-126, which asserts that the Vedas have been divided twenty-eight times in the current *manvantara* but then proceeds to list the names of thirty-two Vyāsas. For a discussion of *manvantara* and the other units of time that make up a *kalpa*, see n. 51.
57. BP 1.4.14; BP 1.5.21; BP 12.6.48-49; BP 1.3.21.
58. BP 1.4.16-18; BP 1.5.12, 21.
59. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa devotes four chapters, VP 3.3-3.6, to discussing the process through which the Veda was divided and disseminated by Vyāsa and his disciples.
60. See, for example, VP 3.2.56; VP 3.3.5-7; VP 3.4.1-14; Vāyu 60.11-22; Brahm. 1.2.34.11-22; KP 1.50.10-20; BP 1.4.14-20, 24; BP 12.6.46-50.
61. VP 3.4.13-14; cf. Vāyu 60.19-20, 22; Brahm. 1.2.34.19-20, 22; KP 1.50.17; BP 12.6.50.
62. See, for example, VP 3.4.7-9, 15-26; VP 3.5.1-3.6.14; Vāyu 60.12-15, 24-31, 63-66;

Vāyu 61.1-55; Brahm. 1.2.34.12-15, 24-32; Brahm. 1.2.34.1-62; KP 1.50.12-14; BP 1.4.21-23; BP 12.6.51-12.7.4.

63. VP 3.4.15.

64. VP 3.6.31-32; cf. Vāyu 61.75; Brahm. 1.2.35.84.

65. See VP 3.2.44, cited earlier. Cf. Vāyu 61.121-122.

66. For a summary of the scholarly debates, see Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, 13-17. Among more recent discussions, see Frederick M. Smith, "Purāṇaveda," in Patton, ed., *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon*, 97-138.

67. See Giorgio Bonazzoli, "The Dynamic Canon of the Purāṇas," *Purāṇa* 21, no. 2 (1979): 116-166. For a discussion of central issues in the scholarly debates concerning the nature and origin of the genre of texts known as "Purāṇas," see Thomas B. Coburn, "The Study of the Purāṇas and the Study of Religion," *Religious Studies* 16, no. 3 (1980): 341-352. For extended analyses of the problems involved in the study and dating of the individual Purāṇas, along with descriptions of the character and contents of individual Purāṇas, see Rocher, *The Purāṇas*; R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975).

68. In his examination of twenty Purāṇas, Bonazzoli notes that twenty-seven lists of Purāṇas are given in seventeen of the Purāṇas, with only the Brahma, Brahmāṇḍa, and Vāmana Purāṇas containing no lists. All of the lists, with the exception of two cases, contain eighteen Purāṇas. See Bonazzoli, "The Dynamic Canon of the Purāṇas," 132-134; table 1, 144-149. See also Anand Swarup Gupta, "Purāṇas and Their Referencing," *Purāṇa* 7, no. 2 (1965): 334-340.

69. For variants of this list, see Bonazzoli, "The Dynamic Canon of the Purāṇas," table 1, 144-149; and Gupta, "Purāṇas and Their Referencing," 336-338.

70. See Bonazzoli, "The Dynamic Canon of the Purāṇas," 134-137; table 2, 150-151; and Gupta, "Purāṇas and Their Referencing," 348-351. The actual number of *ślokas* in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is 16,256.

71. One of the earliest formulations of this definition is found in the *Amarakośa* (ca. fifth century), which defines "Purāṇa" as "that which has five characteristics (*pañca-lakṣaṇa*)" (*Śabdādivarga* 5). For a collation of relevant Purāṇic passages concerning *pañca-lakṣaṇa*, see Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, vol. 5, pt. 2 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962), 838-839, with n. 1365. For an extended study, see Willibald Kirfel, *Das Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa. Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1927).

72. P. V. Kane, for example, remarks: "The extant Purāṇas contain far more subjects than the five. Some Purāṇas barely touch these five and deal at great length with altogether different topics. Only a few of the extant Purāṇas can be said to deal with all the five topics at some length. The five characteristic topics occupy less than three percent of the extent of the extant Mahāpurāṇas" (Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. 5, pt. 2, 841).

73. Bonazzoli, "The Dynamic Canon of the Purāṇas," 131.

74. BP 12.7.10,22.
75. BP 12.13.4-8 lists the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas in the standard order noted earlier. BP 12.7.23-24 lists the same eighteen texts in a different order.
76. BP 12.13.4-9.
77. See BP 12.7.8-20. An alternative enumeration of the ten characteristics is given in BP 2.10.1-7.
78. See Bonazzoli's comparison of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in his "Schemes in the Purāṇas (A First Approach)," *Purāṇa* 24, no. 1 (1982): 160-162, 182-183.
79. For a comparative analysis of the *gopī* narratives in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 497-510.
80. Paul Hacker, *Prahlāda. Werden und Wandlungen einer Idealgestalt. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Hinduismus* (Wiesbaden: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, 1959), vol. 1, 98, 111 n. 1; vol. 2, 224.
81. With respect to the portrayals of the devotee Prahlāda in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Paul Hacker has demonstrated that the more "intellectual" *bhakti* of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is characterized by Prahlāda's remembering, thinking about, or contemplating Viṣṇu, while the more "emotional" *bhakti* of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is characterized by Prahlāda's ecstatic weeping, laughing, singing, and dancing while immersed in the bliss of Kṛṣṇa's love. See Hacker, *Prahlāda*, esp. vol. 1, 93-147. For an extended discussion of the distinctive nature of the "emotional" *bhakti* of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, esp. 36-43.
82. M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 1, pt. 2, trans. S. Ketkar, 2d ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1963), 488. Among other scholars who have noted the homogeneous character of the Bhāgavata, see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 486; Hopkins, "The Social Teaching of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," 4; and Sheo Shanker Prasad, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa: A Literary Study* (Delhi: Capital Publishing House, 1984), 66.
83. See Richard Salomon, "The Viṣṇu Purāṇa as a Specimen of Vernacular Sanskrit," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 30 (1986): 39-56.
84. See, for example, BP 1.4.20; BP 3.12.39; Skanda 5.3.1.18.
85. BP 1.4.20; cf. BP 3.12.39.
86. CU 7.1.2,4; CU 7.2.1; CU 7.7.1.
87. BĀU 2.4.10; BĀU 4.5.11. This passage appears with slight variations in Maitri 6.32. A number of other references in Vedic texts associate the term "Purāṇa" (singular) with the Veda(s). For example, AV 11.7.24, in discussing the remnant of the sacrificial offering, speaks of the "ṛcs, sāmāns, meters, Purāṇa, together with the yajus." ŚB 13.4.3.13, in describing the procedures for a particular sacrifice, specifies that the Adhvaryu should say, "The Purāṇa is the Veda; this it is," and then should "relate some Purāṇa." For a discussion of the meaning of the term Purāṇa in the earliest Vedic text, the R̥g-Veda Saṁhitā, see Ludo Rocher, "The Meaning of *purāṇa* in the R̥gveda," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 21 (1977): 5-24.

88. See, for example, Vāyu 1.18; MP 289.9.
89. See, for example, Vāyu 1.11; ŚP Vāyaviya. 1.1.22,49; BP 1.3.40; BP 2.1.8; BP 2.8.28; BP 12.4.42.
90. Vāyu 1.200-201. Variants of these two *ślokas* appear in ŚP Vāyaviya. 1.1.39-40 and Skanda Prabhāsa 2.93,91 and are also found in separate places in the Mahābhārata, in 1.2.235 and 1.1.204.
91. MP 3.3-4. Variants of this tradition are given in MP 53.3-4; Vāyu 1.60-61; Brahm. 1.1.1.40-41; ŚP Vāyaviya. 1.1.31-32; Padma Śrṣṭi. 1.45.
92. MP 53.3-11.
93. ŚP Vāyaviya. 1.1.31-38; Nār. Pūrva. 92.22-26; Padma Śrṣṭi. 1.45-52; LP 1.1.1-3.
94. Brahm. 1.2.34.19-22; Vāyu 60.19-22; VP 3.4.13-14; VP 3.6.16.
95. Brahm. 1.2.34.12-16; Brahm. 1.2.35.63-69; Vāyu 60.12-16; Vāyu 61.55-61; VP 3.4.7-10; VP 3.6.17-20; cf. Agni 271.10-12. These two alternative Purāṇic traditions concerning the origins of the Purāṇas have been noted by a number of scholars, including Coburn, "The Study of the Purāṇas and the Study of Religion," 344-346; Bonazzoli, "Schemes in the Purāṇas," 174-175; Bonazzoli, "The Dynamic Canon of the Purāṇas," 139-140; and Gupta, "Purāṇas and Their Referencing," 323-326. For additional discussions of these traditions, see Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, 45-48; Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. 5, pt. 2, 829, with n. 1349; 858, with n. 1392; 861-862; V. S. Agrawala, "Original Purāṇa Samhitā," *Purāṇa* 8, no. 2 (1966): 232-239; R. C. Hazra, "The Purāṇas," in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 2, 2d rev. ed. (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1962), 244; V. R. Ramchandra Dikshitar, "The Purāṇas: A Study," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1932): 751-755; and F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 21-23.
96. BP 3.12.37,39.
97. BP 1.4.14-24; BP 12.6.46-12.7.7.
98. BP 12.6.46-12.7.7; cf. BP 1.4.19-23.
99. BP 12.7.8-24.
100. See Coburn, "'Scripture' in India," esp. 445-455; and Brown, "Purāṇa as Scripture: From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition," *History of Religions* 26, no. 1 (1986): 74-76.
101. For a discussion of the Purāṇic "cult of the book," see Brown, "Purāṇa as Scripture," 76-83. For an analysis of the role and interrelationship of oral and written transmission in the Purāṇas, see Giorgio Bonazzoli, "Composition, Transmission and Recitation of the Purāṇas," *Purāṇa* 25, no. 2 (1983): 254-280.
102. Padma Uttara. 236.18-21.
103. MP 53.68-69.
104. ŚP Vāyaviya 1.1.22,49.
105. ŚP Vāyaviya 1.1.57.
106. ŚP Vāyaviya 1.1.18.
107. BP 1.4.7.
108. BP 1.3.40; BP 2.1.8; BP 2.8.28; BP 12.4.42.

109. BP 1.2.3.
110. BP 12.13.12,15.
111. Devi 12.14.31.
112. Devi 12.14.26.
113. Devi 12.14.31.
114. BP 1.3.28.
115. The earliest reference to Kṛṣṇa is in Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.17.6, which represents "Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devakī," as a disciple of Ghora Āṅgīrasa.
116. Smith, "Purāṇaveda," 98.
117. See F. J. Meier, "Der Archaismus in der Sprache des Bhāgavata-Purāṇa," *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik* 8 (1931): 33-79; Louis Renou, *Histoire de la langue sanskrite* (Lyon: Editions IAC, 1956), 120-121; J. A. B. van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," in Singer, ed., *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, 23-40; Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 489-490; and Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, 145-146. For a formal analysis of the linguistic peculiarities of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, see Ashutosh Sarma Biswas, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa: A Linguistic Study, Particularly from the Vedic Background* (Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Book Agency, 1968). For a general study of the language, style, and meter of the Bhāgavata, see Prasad, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 65-97.
118. Van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," 31, 33.
119. Ibid. Smith's essay analyzes how the Bhāgavata Purāṇa attempts to establish its Vedic identity through reinterpreting and reshaping three central Vedic categories: the infallibility of the Veda, the Vedic deities Agni and Soma, and the institution of sacrifice.
120. BP 12.13.14-17.
121. BP 1.3.42.
122. This assertion appears not only as part of the Bhāgavata's declaration of its superior status among the Purāṇas (BP 12.13.15) but also immediately before this declaration (BP 12.13.12).
123. BP 1.2.3.
124. BP 1.4.7.
125. BP 1.1.3.
126. BP 1.3.40; BP 2.1.8; BP 2.8.28; BP 12.4.42.
127. BP 1.1.11; cf. BP 1.3.42.
128. BP 1.4.14-1.5.40.
129. BP 1.7.3-4.
130. BP 1.7.3-8.
131. BP 8.16.31.
132. BP 7.11.7; cf. 10.16.44.
133. See, for example, BP 7.3.30; BP 1.5.37; BP 5.22.3. For additional references regarding Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of Veda, see the earlier discussion under "Veda and Brahman," with nn. 31-35.
134. See the earlier discussion under "Veda and Brahmā," "Vedic Ṛṣis," and "Veda-



Vyāsa."

135. BP 3.12.34,37; BP 12.6.44.
136. See, for example, BP 8.14.4; BP 12.6.44-46; BP 11.14.3-7.
137. BP 1.4.14-20,24; BP 12.6.46-50.
138. BP 1.1.1.
139. BP 11.14.3.
140. See, for example, BP 7.9.47; BP 1.2.28; BP 5.22.3; BP 11.5.10; BP 11.21.43; BP 11.14.3.
141. BP 3.18.15; BP 3.9.43; cf. BP 2.6.34. See also BP 3.12.34-35,37-40,44-48, which, as discussed earlier, describe Brahmā as Śabdabrahman, whose psychophysical being is composed of the Sanskrit *varṇas* and the Vedic *mantras* and meters.
142. BP 3.12.1; BP 3.13.6.
143. BP 3.9.24; cf. BP 3.12.34.
144. See, for example, BP 8.14.4,8.
145. BP 12.6.49; BP 1.4.14; BP 1.5.21; BP 1.3.21.
146. BP 2.8.28; BP 12.13.10,19-20; BP 2.9.43.
147. BP 2.9.43-44; BP 12.13.19; cf. BP 12.4.41.
148. BP 1.3.40; BP 1.4.14; BP 1.5.21; BP 12.6.49; BP 1.3.21.
149. See, for example, BP 1.5.22; BP 12.12.62; cf. BP 12.13.1.
150. Bhāgavata Māhātmya 1.20.
151. BP 1.3.40; BP 2.1.8; BP 2.8.28.
152. Bhāgavata Māhātmya 1.20.
153. BP 1.3.40,42,45.
154. See, for example, BP 12.13.13. For an analysis of the Purāṇic "cult of the book," see Brown, "Purāṇa as Scripture," 76-83.
155. BP 1.4.7.
156. See esp. BP 12.12.57-64.
157. BP 12.12.62.
158. BP 1.4.25; BP 12.12.64. As discussed earlier, this socially inclusive approach to recitation is characteristic of the Purāṇas in general. For a discussion of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa's attitudes towards the brahmanical social system, see Hopkins, "The Social Teaching of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa."
159. BP 1.1.3; BP 12.13.11; BP 12.4.40; BP 12.13.15.
160. See, for example, BP 12.12.58-59,64. BP 1.5.11.
161. See, for example, BP 1.5.40; BP 1.7.6-7; BP 3.8.2; BP 12.4.40; BP 12.12.57.
162. See, for example, BP 12.4.40; BP 1.5.13; BP 12.13.18.
163. See, for example, BP 1.7.6-7; BP 2.1.10.
164. See, for example, BP 1.1.2; BP 12.12.63.
165. BP 10.87.12-41.
166. BP 8.21.2; cf. BP 10.8.45.

## APPROPRIATION AND SUBORDINATION OF VEDIC AUTHORITY IN THE GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVA TRADITION

Travis Chilcott

One of the factors that is shared by many of the traditions that are brought together under the rubric of “Hinduism” is their acceptance, on some fundamental level, of the Veda as a source of transcendent knowledge and authority. Brian K. Smith goes so far as to claim that “Hinduism is the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimizing reference to the authority of the Veda.”<sup>1</sup> Among this confederation of traditions, Vedic authority has come to assume a very important symbolic role in relation to a text’s or tradition’s claims to authority. Indeed, it is by invoking, appropriating, emulating, and at times challenging the Veda that texts and traditions attempt to establish their own authority among the diversity of “Hinduisms.”

In this essay I will examine the role of the Veda in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, an important and influential *bhakti* tradition with its origins in sixteenth-century Bengal. Specifically, I will analyze the ways in which the authority of the Veda is invoked and appropriated in the context of the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*, an early seventeenth-century text composed by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. The *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* is a didactic hagiographical treatise on the life of Caitanya, the founder of the Gauḍīya tradition, who is represented in the text as Kṛṣṇa himself—or more precisely, the combined form of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa—in the mood of a *bhakta*, or devotee. As we shall see, Kṛṣṇadāsa is not only concerned with establishing the authority of the Vedas and using this authority to legitimate Gauḍīya theology, but he ultimately seeks to subordinate their authority in relation to the principles of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* (devotion) and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teachings. The authority of the Vedas thus serves as a critical tool for establishing Gauḍīya theology as *the* theology par excellence,

investing it with an authority that surpasses even that of the Vedas themselves.

I have chosen to focus my analysis on the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* for two reasons. The first reason is its immense theological importance in the context of the Gauḍīya canon. As noted by Edward C. Dimock, Jr., and Tony K. Stewart in their introduction to Dimock's translation of the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*: "It is a compendium of historical fact, religious legend, and abstruse theology so complete and blended in such proportions that it is the definitive work of the religious group called Vaiṣṇava, since the time of Caitanya the most significant single religious group in all of eastern India."<sup>2</sup> The *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*, which is held to have been completed in 1615 C.E. by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, has come to be accepted as one of the tradition's most important theological works.<sup>3</sup>

The second reason for my choice is that, unlike the majority of the Gauḍīya tradition's other early definitive theological works, which are written in Sanskrit, the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* is written in Bengali. Whereas the Sanskrit works would have been accessible only to an elite class of learned readers and teachers in the seventeenth century, the Bengali vernacular—even if in an elite form of the language—would have been accessible to a substantially larger number of people. As such the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* may provide a more accurate impression of how the Vedas and the weight of their authority were perceived in the lives of the general populace of the time.

### The Veda

Before examining the various ways in which Kṛṣṇadāsa invokes the authority of the Veda, or Vedas, it is important to first ask the more general question, to what do these terms refer? On an abstract level, the term "Veda," which means "knowledge," refers to what Barbara Holdrege calls "its symbolic function as knowledge—not the ordinary knowledge derived through the powers of human reasoning but that transcendent, infinite knowledge which is held to be the essence of ultimate reality and the source and foundation of creation."<sup>4</sup> As a textual category, the term "Vedas"—in the plural—refers to the texts that are invested with the social and religious authority of the Veda by virtue of their being accepted as concrete manifestations of this transcendent knowledge. The meanings of the term "Vedas" as a textual category range from the most restricted sense of the four Vedic Saṃhitās to the most encompassing sense, in which the term is expanded to include potentially the entire canon of *śruti* ("that which was heard") and *smṛti* ("that which was remembered") literature.

In surveying the various ways in which the category of Veda has been applied historically by Hindu traditions, Holdrege points out that the term Veda is primarily used in four distinct senses.<sup>5</sup> In its most narrow sense, the term is used to designate the four Vedic Saṁhitās (ca. 1500-800 B.C.E.)—R̥g-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sāma-Veda, and Atharva-Veda—which form the initial core of the *śruti* texts. These four Saṁhitās consist of collections (*saṁhitā*) of four types of mantras—*ṛcs*, *yajuses*, *sāmans*, and *atharvans*, respectively. These core *śruti* texts are considered to have been cognized by Vedic *ṛṣis* (“seers”) at the beginning of each cycle of creation and are ascribed an infallible authority on the basis of their primordial and transcendent status. The primary purpose of the mantras is their ritual employment in Vedic sacrificial rituals (*yajñas*).

In its second sense, the term Veda is extended to include the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads, which together with the Saṁhitās constitute the four main genres of *śruti* literature. The Brāhmaṇas (ca. 900-650 B.C.E.) are sacrificial manuals that serve as “how-to” guides for the performance of Vedic *yajñas* and that provide explanations of the purpose and meaning of the mantras in the context of the sacrificial rituals. The Āraṇyakas are less concerned with directing ritual performances and turn their attention towards reflection on the inner meaning of particular rituals.

Unlike the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas, which are directly concerned with sacrificial rituals, the Upaniṣads (ca. 800-200 B.C.E.) shift their attention to metaphysical ruminations regarding ultimate reality—especially notions of Brahman—and the means of liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of birth and death (*saṁsāra*). This shift of emphasis marks the divide of the early Vedic literature into two main sections: the *karma-kāṇḍa*, the portion of the Vedas addressing ritual action, and the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the portion of the Vedas addressing transcendent knowledge.

In its third sense, the term Veda is further extended to include two genres of post-Vedic literature that are technically classified as *smṛti* texts: the Itihāsas—the Mahābhārata (ca. 400 B.C.E.-400 C.E.) and the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki (ca. 300 B.C.E.-300 C.E.)—and the Purāṇas (ca. 300-1600 C.E.). In contrast to *śruti* texts, these *smṛti* texts are held to have been composed by personal authors and are located within historical time. These texts adopt several strategies for appropriating the authority of the Veda, such as claiming to be the “fifth Veda” alongside the original four Vedic Saṁhitās.<sup>6</sup> Some strategies that are more specific to the Purāṇic context are brought to light in Frederick M. Smith’s essay, “Purāṇa-Veda,” which, through a crit-

ical analysis of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, examines the “mechanisms through which the images of the Vedas were transmitted and transformed in the Purāṇas.”<sup>7</sup> These include various strategies for sharing in the status of infallibility enjoyed by the Veda; utilizing narratives concerning the principal Vedic sacrificial gods, Agni and Soma; and appropriating Vedic sacrificial imagery. Through these and other mechanisms, the Purāṇas justify their theological agendas and secure their status as extensions of the Veda while at the same time conveying their teachings in a manner suitable for the general populace.

Finally, in its fourth sense, as Holdrege has emphasized, the Veda serves as an open-ended symbol that can be extended to include potentially any *smṛti* text. The category of *smṛti* maintains a porous character that is more open and flexible than the category of *śruti*, which is technically closed. Such flexibility allows a diverse range of texts to seek *smṛti* status and thereby, by extension, to secure their place as part of the encompassing symbol of Veda.<sup>8</sup> In a twist of irony, however, such texts, while assimilating themselves to the Veda, at the same time often end up supplanting the *śruti* in primacy and importance—both in terms of their theological import and their practical significance for a particular tradition. As we shall see, this is what happens in the context of the Gauḍīya tradition.

In light of the different ways in which the category of Veda has been understood, appropriated, and applied, what should be unambiguously clear is the premium placed on the authority of the Veda. If a text is to attain a meaningful place in the *śruti* or *smṛti* canon, it is necessary that it share in the authority of the Veda—an authority derived from the transcendent status and symbolic function of the Veda as the totality of knowledge. With these points in mind, we can now fruitfully turn to the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja to examine some of the principal ways in which this text invokes and appropriates the Veda in relation to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology.

### The Veda and the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*

In the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja makes reference to numerous textual genres—Veda, Vedas, *śruti*, *smṛti*, *śāstras*, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, and Āgamas—and to a host of more specific texts—such as the Vedānta-Sūtra (or Brahma-Sūtra, often referred to by Kṛṣṇadāsa as “Vyāsa-Sūtra”) and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa—as well as to a number of more regional texts that would

have carried an authority for a much smaller number of people. Our main concern is with the ways in which he invokes the Veda, Vedas, and *śruti* literature, since the collective referents of these terms share an interchangeable degree of authority not always shared with other texts and textual genres—it is the latter that are viewed and legitimated in relation to the former and not the other way around. Kṛṣṇadāsa utilizes the category of Veda and its equivalents intentionally, didactically, and with reference to the authority they command. More specifically, he invokes the category of Veda for three principal purposes: (1) to establish the authoritative status of the Vedas; (2) to legitimate important Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theological concepts, especially those that might be construed as sectarian in nature; and (3) to subordinate the Vedas in relation to particular Gauḍīya theological teachings and texts as a means of establishing the superiority of the latter.

### Authority of the Vedas

One of the principal reasons Kṛṣṇadāsa invokes the Vedas is to acknowledge and establish their authoritative status as indisputable, “self-evident” truth: “The Veda is self-proven, the crest-jewel of proofs.”<sup>9</sup> “The Vedas are their own proof, and that which they say is true.”<sup>10</sup> In these comments, which are attributed to Caitanya in the context of his discussions on scriptural hermeneutics with certain Advaita Vedāntins, the term Veda refers not only to the *śruti* texts generally, but more specifically to the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* portion of the Vedas consisting of the Upaniṣads. Building on Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā notions that the Vedas are eternal (*nitya*) and beginningless (*anādi*) and have no human author or agent (*apauruṣeya*), the Veda is accepted by the followers of both Advaita Vedānta and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava traditions as intrinsically self-proven (*svataḥ-prāmāṇya*) and unerringly free from any defect. As such, the Veda is invoked here to acknowledge its self-evident truth and indisputable authority. Unlike the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsākas and Advaita Vedāntins, however, the Gauḍīyas, in line with their theistic leanings, also subscribe to the notion that the Vedas are manifested through the agency of the divine will of the supreme Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the Vedas will be discussed in more detail later.

### The Vedas and Gauḍīya Teachings

Having acknowledged the infallible authority of the Vedas, Kṛṣṇadāsa is able to use that authority to legitimate specific teachings of the Gauḍīya

Vaiṣṇava tradition. Of these teachings the most critical is the assertion that Kṛṣṇa, as the supreme Lord, Bhagavān, is the ultimate reality who is designated as “Brahman” in the Upaniṣads and who is therefore the central focus of the Upaniṣadic teachings. One of the principal ways Kṛṣṇadāsa ascribes Vedic status to such Gauḍīya teachings is through narrations of Caitanya’s hermeneutical discussions of the Vedānta-Sūtra—the commentary on the Upaniṣads ascribed to the sage Vyāsa—with the Advaita Vedāntin followers of Śaṅkara, who subscribe to a purely monistic understanding of absolute reality. In these contexts, with the infallible authority of the Vedas established, Caitanya offers a critique of Śaṅkara’s commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the Vedānta-Sūtra and the general teachings of Advaita Vedānta.

Caitanya’s central argument is that Śaṅkara, in pursuit of his monistic agenda, focuses on the secondary meanings of Vedic—and more specifically, Upaniṣadic—declarations rather than their primary meanings, thereby obscuring the latter and putting forth conclusions that are erroneous. These conclusions are considered so flawed that those who follow them are deemed by Gauḍīyas to be even lower than the heterodox Buddhists: “Not honoring the Veda, the Buddhists are atheists; and lower than Buddhists are those who follow atheism, while taking refuge in the Veda.”<sup>11</sup> In the course of his critiques of Śaṅkara and the teachings of Advaita Vedānta, Caitanya advances his principal thesis that Kṛṣṇa is the primary meaning of the Vedas—and it is this primary meaning that Śaṅkara and his followers fail to apprehend.

This basic argument is made in the context of Caitanya’s discussions with a group of Advaitin *saṁnyāsins* in Vārāṇasī and later with his yet-to-be-converted Advaitin mentor, Śārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya. A closer analysis of the argument will reveal both the importance placed on the infallibility of Vedic authority and the ways in which this authority is invoked by Caitanya to legitimate the sectarian teachings of the Gauḍīyas in the context of his critique of Advaita Vedānta.

The Vedānta Sūtra is the word of Īśvara, which Śrī Nārāyaṇa spoke when in the form of Vyāsa. Error, confusion, contradiction, want of skill—these faults are not present in the word of Īśvara. Together with the Upaniṣads the sūtra speaks the truth, and that meaning is of the greatest excellence and is easily perceived. But the Ācārya [Śaṅkara] made the *bhāṣya* according to the secondary meaning, and by listening to him all things are destroyed.<sup>12</sup>

The Vedas are their own proof, and that which they say is true. If one expounds the secondary meaning, their intrinsic provenness is destroyed.<sup>13</sup>

These statements revolve around the ways in which the meaning(s) of a declaration in *śāstra* should be interpreted. The meaning(s) of a statement can be discerned through literal or non-literal interpretation or a combination thereof. As Dimock points out in his commentary, three levels of meaning are generally accepted: *mukhya-vṛtti*, *lakṣaṇā*, and *gauṇa-vṛtti*.<sup>14</sup> *Mukhyavṛtti* refers to primary meaning, which is the most literal, direct, and obvious meaning. *Lakṣaṇā* is the implied meaning, in which the primary meaning is extended or adapted according to the context. *Gauṇavṛtti* is the metaphorical meaning, which goes beyond the intended primary meaning. Both *lakṣaṇā* and *gauṇavṛtti* are treated as secondary meanings in Caitanya's arguments with Advaitin Vedāntins.

At issue in Caitanya's hermeneutical discussions with the followers of Śaṅkara is the understanding of a number of key ontological categories and their interrelationships:

- \* Brahman, the ground of being, which is both immanent and transcendent
- \* *para-tattva*, the ontological nature of the ultimate reality, including the conceptions of Brahman, Īśvara, and *śakti*
- \* *jīva-tattva*, the ontological nature of individual living beings
- \* *jagat-rūpa*, the nature of the phenomenal world

Caitanya begins his critique by establishing the infallibility of *śruti* and the Vedānta-Sūtra—the authority of which both parties accept—and arguing that Śaṅkara, in his interpretations of both the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta-Sūtra, overlooks the primary meaning of key statements that do not lend support to his non-dualistic conclusions.<sup>15</sup> He substantiates this argument with an example: “The chief meaning in the word *brahma* is Bhagavān, made up of *cit* and divinity and none is equal or superior to him. His glory and his body—all are formed by *cit*; hiding the glory of the *cit*, he [Śaṅkara] calls him *nirakara*.”<sup>16</sup> *Cit* is understood in this context to mean *śakti*, power, and Caitanya argues that it is only through bypassing the *mukhya-vṛtti* interpretation of *śakti*'s role in the scheme of ultimate reality that Śaṅkara is able to put forth his interpretation that Brahman is *nirakara*, or without form. The critical import of Caitanya's argument is made clear by Dimock in his commentary on these verses:

The argument is essentially that *brahma* is said in the *śruti* to possess *śakti*



(e.g., *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.8), that *śakti* implies action, and action implies differentiation: power as an abstract force is meaningless. . . . The *śruti* also says that *brahma* is the greatest of all, supreme, infinite: and *brahma* is infinite in all ways, in *svarūpa*, in *śakti*, in the activities of *śakti*, and the differentiation of the manifestation of *śakti* (*Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.8).<sup>17</sup>

The implication of Caitanya's argument is that if the words of the *śruti* are accepted as infallible, then when drawing conclusions about the nature of Brahman, one must take all of the Upaniṣads' descriptive statements of Brahman into consideration—not only some to the neglect of others. The *śruti* states that Brahman possesses *śakti*, which necessarily indicates action, and action in turn implies differentiation, since without differentiation on any level there could be no action. Caitanya thus concludes that the purely monistic ontology advanced by Śaṅkara—in which Brahman is an undifferentiated unitary reality that is without form and without qualities—is an erroneous interpretation that obscures the primary meaning of the Upaniṣads.

Having established this fundamental flaw in Śaṅkara's interpretation of Brahman, Caitanya builds on his initial critique and proceeds to fault other critical aspects of Advaita Vedānta teachings. His critiques are directed towards such teachings as the theory of illusion, or *māyā* (*vivarta-vāda*),<sup>18</sup> the notion that Īśvara's body is material (*prākṛta*);<sup>19</sup> the conflation of the *jīva-tattva* and *para-tattva* as being one and the same;<sup>20</sup> and the precedence given to *tat tvam asi* ("you are that") over the *praṇava* syllable (*om*) as the most important aphorism of the *śruti*.<sup>21</sup> Caitanya argues that these hallmark teachings of Advaita Vedānta are derived from interpretations that privilege secondary meanings (*lakṣaṇā-vyākhyāna* and *gauṇa-artha*) at the expense of the primary (*mukhya-vṛtti*) and natural or straightforward meanings (*sahaja-artha*) of Vedic declarations:

In all the *sūtras* and the Vedas there are denotations of Kṛṣṇa; but he has abandoned this primary meaning, and has explained the secondary one. The Veda is self-proven, the crest-jewel of proofs; if one interprets the secondary meaning, this self-provenness is destroyed. Like this, he has abandoned the simple meaning, and by means of his imagination he has given the secondary one.<sup>22</sup>

Caitanya thus concludes that Śaṅkara and his followers neglect the primary meanings of statements in the Vedānta-Sūtra and the Vedas—particularly the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* sections of the *śruti*—and put forth secondary interpretations in their stead.

After Caitanya has established that the interpretations and teachings of Advaita Vedānta are faulty, the Advaitins are portrayed as accepting his critique and requesting that he explain the primary meanings, thus paving the way for Caitanya to put forth his own theistic interpretations and teachings establishing Kṛṣṇa as the highest truth. In answer to their sincere inquiry, Caitanya explains to them that this “great substance” (*byhad-vastu*) known as Brahman he calls Śrī Bhagavān, who is the possessor of six kinds of divine powers (*ṣaḍvidhaiśvarya-pūrṇa*).<sup>23</sup> In other words, what the Advaitins call “Brahman” Caitanya designates by the term “Bhagavān.”

The term “Bhagavān” distinguishes the new understanding of Brahman introduced by Caitanya—in which Brahman is differentiated by virtue of possessing *śakti*—from the purely monistic conception of Brahman that the Advaitins had previously held. It is important to note that the terms Bhagavān and Brahman do not refer to two different realities, but rather to two different aspects of one reality, the *byhad-vastu*, with Bhagavān referring to a more complete understanding of this reality than is indicated by the Advaitins’ use of the term Brahman. To ensure that this point is understood, Caitanya reiterates the Advaitins’ misconception in thinking of Brahman as wholly undifferentiated: “Calling him ‘*nirviśeṣa*,’ not honoring his *cit-śakti*, is not honoring half of his true form, and the fullness of him is lost.”<sup>24</sup> The significance of this argument is noted by Dimock in his comments on a previous verse carrying a similar import:

The Māyāvādins argue that *brahma* is infinite and undifferentiated, and therefore must be formless, for form implies differentiation and finiteness. But it has been shown that *brahma* is indeed differentiated, so it is possible to be infinite and differentiated; it is therefore also possible to be infinite and possess form.<sup>25</sup>

Having demonstrated that Brahman is differentiated, Caitanya has thus opened the door for establishing his theistic conception of Kṛṣṇa as the personal *ūber*-deity, who possesses a transcendent form composed of *cit-śakti* and who is the source of everything, including Brahman. Within Gauḍīya theology, Brahman is considered to be the radiance of Kṛṣṇa’s body. It is thus an aspect of the ultimate reality but one that is subordinate to the highest aspect known as Bhagavān, which is differentiated and personal.

With this new understanding of Brahman in place—which Caitanya now refers to as Bhagavān—it is only a short step to equating Bhagavān with Kṛṣṇa. This step, however, requires moving out of the realm of the *śruti* and tak-

ing recourse in the *smṛti*, and in particular the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. This is most clearly articulated in Caitanya's exchange with Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya, where he admits that the connection between Brahman, Bhagavān, and Kṛṣṇa cannot easily be established without the direct aid of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa: "By the word '*brahma*' is meant '*full svayam bhagavān*'; and *svayam bhagavān* is Kṛṣṇa; this is proven by the *śāstras*. This profound meaning of the Vedas is not [easily] understood; but that meaning is established by the words of the *purāṇa*."<sup>26</sup> The expression "*svayam bhagavān*" indicates the full and supreme deity himself, who is the source of all other forms and manifestations of divinity. *Svayam bhagavān*, who encompasses yet is beyond Brahman, is Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya suggests, however, that this understanding is the secret of the Vedas and is only accessible through the Bhāgavatā Purāṇa. This move from the *śruti* to the *smṛti* text of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is justified on the basis of the special status ascribed to the Bhāgavata, as we shall discuss later.

In light of the way in which the relationship among Brahman, Bhagavān, and Kṛṣṇa is interpreted by Caitanya, it is easier to understand how Caitanya is able to make the claim that "In all the *sūtras* and the Vedas there are denotations of Kṛṣṇa."<sup>27</sup> Once identified with Brahman, Kṛṣṇa can be understood as the actual semantic focus of the Vedas, particularly in the context of the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* where Brahman is the focal point of speculation. Yet Kṛṣṇa is not only limited to being the primary subject of the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*. As Brahman he is also the source of the Veda, and as the source of the Veda he is finally the focus of everything contained within it. Caitanya, invoking the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, declares:

Whether it be a primary or secondary issue, whether it be the rule or the exception—that which the Veda asserts exclusively is called Kṛṣṇa: "What is enjoined? What is overtly stated? What can be restated by philosophical argument back and forth? No one except for me knows the essence of all of this. They enjoin me; they manifest me; I am the conclusion which they reach, debating it."<sup>28</sup>

As the source of the Vedas, Kṛṣṇa is their ultimate conclusion, even when his name is not explicitly stated. For this reason—as suggested elsewhere by Sanātana when praising Caitanya, who is identified as Kṛṣṇa—there is no reason to know anything other than him: "You are the incarnate Īśvara, Vrajendranandana [Kṛṣṇa]. With your breath you inspired all the Vedas. You are the speaker of the Bhāgavata and you know its meanings; there is

no need to know anything other than you.”<sup>29</sup> As the source and embodiment of transcendent knowledge, Kṛṣṇa—here identified with Caitanya—is all that needs to be known. There is no need to go anywhere else for true knowledge.

### Subordination of the Vedas

Kṛṣṇadāsa, having invested with Vedic authority the Gauḍīya teaching that Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate reality who encompasses and surpasses Brahman and who is the source and goal of the Vedas, goes even further and seeks to subordinate the Vedas—and in particular the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas—to the principles of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*.

Whereas the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas is a source of knowledge about Brahman and is of central importance to the Vedāntins, the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas is a source of knowledge about *dharma* and is championed by the Mīmāṃsakas. The *karma-kāṇḍa* of the *śruti*, together with its correlates in the *smṛti* literature such as the Dharma-śāstras, is concerned with both ritual and social actions and provides the injunctions that serve to ground the social order. Referring to the Vedas in the more limited sense of the Vedic injunctions, Kṛṣṇadāsa relegates the Vedas—their authority and their teachings—to a position subordinate to Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*.

This subordination of the Vedas is accomplished in a number of different ways. For example, Kṛṣṇa is described as being more attracted by the love of his devotees (*bhaktas*) than he is by those who praise the Vedas: “. . . [They] steal my mind away from those who sing the praise of the Vedas; it is for the sake of these pure *bhaktas* that I have descended, and it is for their sake that I shall perform all kinds of wonderful activities.”<sup>30</sup> Kṛṣṇa is devoted to his devotees, and he is more attracted by them than he is by those who constantly praise the Vedas and live their lives in accordance with the dharmic injunctions of the Vedas. This dynamic goes the other way as well: his devotees are more attracted to him than they are to the Vedic injunctions. In fact, their love is represented as being so strong and their devotion to Kṛṣṇa so great that they transgress their socially and religiously enjoined duties (*dharma*) in order to please him. Nowhere is this expression of devotion greater than in the behavior and mood of the *gopīs*, the cowherd maidens of Vraja, who serve as models of the highest devotion:

*Loka-dharma*, Vedic *dharma*, the *dharma* of the body, the path of karma, modesty, composure, bodily comfort, the inner peace of soul, the path of propri-

ety not abandoned easily, their own families—abandoning all these and taking to themselves much punishment and rebuke [the *gopīs*] worshiped Kṛṣṇa. They served him in *prema* for the sake of his happiness.<sup>31</sup>

In the dead of night, when the *gopīs* hear Kṛṣṇa calling them with his flute, they go against all social customs and norms (*loka-dharma*), transgress the religious principles enjoined by Vedic teachings (Vedic *dharma*), and abandon their parents, husbands, and children in order to meet Kṛṣṇa and engage in conjugal affairs with him. In Gauḍiya theology it is due to this willingness to give up anything and everything for Kṛṣṇa—even that which is enjoined by Vedic injunctions—that the *gopīs* are celebrated as the paradigmatic emblems of devotion: “He whose greed is for the nectar of that *gopī-bhāva* leaves the *loka* of the *dharma* of the Vedas and worships Kṛṣṇa.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, one disregards the dharmic injunctions of the Vedas in favor of worshipping Kṛṣṇa because these injunctions are secondary to the principles of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*.

Another illustration of the subordination of Vedic injunctions to Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* is given in the example of Sārva-bhauma Bhāṭṭācārya:

Today he [Kṛṣṇa] has broken the constraints pertaining to your [Sārva-bhauma’s] physical body and related matters, today you have severed the bonds of *māyā*. Today your heart has become devoted to the attainment of Kṛṣṇa, and transgressing the *dharma* of the Vedas, you have eaten the *prasāda*.<sup>33</sup>

Attributed to Caitanya, these words are spoken in praise of Sārva-bhauma, who, having recently been converted by Caitanya, has just consciously transgressed the principles of ritual purity in favor of honoring the *prasāda* of Jagannātha<sup>34</sup> before taking his bath or performing his morning rites. The gravity of this transgression of Vedic *dharma* was compounded by the fact it was committed by a man who was a brahmin. Yet because it was done out of respect for the *prasāda*, Caitanya deems it be a glorious act that signifies Sārva-bhauma’s internal conversion to the path of *bhakti*. This incident is cited by Kṛṣṇadāsa to clearly demonstrate the subordination of Vedic *dharma* to Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, establishing the preeminence of the latter.

The subordination of the ritual and social prescriptions of the Vedas to the dictates of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* hinges on the understanding that Kṛṣṇa is the source of the Vedas by virtue of his identification with Bhāgavan and Brahman. Moreover, this identification, as mentioned earlier, is contingent on

the teachings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, since there is no explicit reference in the *śruti* to the deity Kṛṣṇa who is celebrated in the Gauḍīya tradition. This brings us back to the critical point to which I promised to return: how is the move from the *śruti* to the *smṛti* text of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa justified? How are the Gauḍīyas able to justify their subordination of the authority of the Vedas to the authority of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa? The answer to this question can be found in the Gauḍīya tradition's understanding of the relationship between the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Vedas.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is considered to be the essence of the Vedas and to deliver the true meaning of the Vedic texts. The descriptions of the Bhāgavata as the essence of the Vedas are found mostly in the context of Caitanya's hermeneutical discussions of the Vedānta-Sūtra. As mentioned earlier, the Vedānta-Sūtra—the commentary on the Upaniṣads to which Kṛṣṇadāsa sometimes refers as the “Vyāsa-Sūtra”—is traditionally understood to have been composed by Vyāsa, the divinely empowered sage who is considered to be an incarnation of Nārāyaṇa and who is responsible for dividing the original Veda into the four Vedic Saṃhitās. Vyāsa is also celebrated as the author of the eighteen Purāṇas, including the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. In this context the Bhāgavata is revered by the Gauḍīya tradition as Vyāsa's own commentary on the Vedānta-Sūtra. Hence, connected by their link with Vyāsa, a relationship is established among these various texts—the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the four Vedic Saṃhitās, the Upaniṣads, and the Vedānta-Sūtras—that serves as the hermeneutical linchpin for establishing the Bhāgavata as the essence of the Vedas that explains the true import of the Upaniṣads and other Vedic texts:

The meanings of the *Vyāsa-sūtras* are profound, for Vyāsa was Bhagavān. No *jīva* can know the meaning of his *sūtras*, and thus he has explained his own *sūtras* himself. For if the maker of *sūtras* himself explains them, then people know their basic meaning. . . . The four Vedas and the Upaniṣads—as many as there are, Vyāsa expounded upon their meanings. And in those *sūtras*, the Vedic matters that were discussed prompted the *ślokas* in the *Bhāgavata*. Thus the *Śrī Bhāgavata* is the commentary on the *sūtras*; thus the *ślokas* of the *Bhāgavata* and of the Upaniṣads have the same meaning.<sup>35</sup>

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is thus invested with special canonical authority because it is Vyāsa's commentary on his Vedānta-Sūtra commentary on the *śruti*. Once one has understood this special status of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, its authority and teachings naturally supersede all other Vedic teachings.

There is no longer a need to focus on the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* or the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas since there is no need to go to any source other than the Bhāgavata Purāṇa for understanding what is the highest truth, how one should act in the world, and how one should live in order to attain the ultimate goal of human existence. All one needs to do is follow the teachings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

There is, however, yet a further reason why the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is considered the best among the Vedic scriptures. In the context of an extended hermeneutical discourse in which Caitanya demonstrates how the Bhāgavata is the essence of the Vedas, he concludes by declaring the text to be even more important than the Vedas due to its being the embodiment of *rasa*: "The Śrī Bhāgavata is the true form of the *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*; in it there is more greatness than in the Veda-*sāstras*. . . . Thus, examine the Bhāgavata, and from it you will gain the essential meaning of the *sūtra-śruti*."<sup>36</sup> In the Gauḍīya tradition the *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, or *bhakti-rasa*, refers to the highest transcendent form of aesthetic enjoyment that arises from exchanges between Bhagavān and his devotees through the process of pure *bhakti*. If one is able to access and experience that *rasa*, then one is able to experience the essence of what is to be grasped through studying and following the teachings of the Vedas. In this way, Caitanya concludes that the Bhāgavata is more important than the Vedas—not simply because it delivers their essential meaning, but because through its narrative content and form it is the embodiment of *bhakti-rasa*.

### Concluding Reflections

The principal reasons for which Kṛṣṇadāsa invokes and appropriates the Vedas in the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* are centered around their transcendent authority. Through acknowledging and establishing the authority of the Vedas, he is able to use this authority to legitimate specific Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teachings and to invest with Vedic status the *smṛti* texts from which these teachings are derived. Yet in ways unique to the Gauḍīya context, Kṛṣṇadāsa goes even further and uses this appropriated authority to subordinate the authoritative sources from which it is derived. This is most clearly seen in the subordination of the injunctions of the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Vedas to Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* and of the *śruti* texts more generally to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Despite the potentially risky nature of this enterprise—due to the social and soteriological repercussions that can potentially arise from mis-



representing or transgressing the Vedas—Kṛṣṇadāsa has no qualms about his agenda. This is because from his perspective the subordination of Vedic teachings to the principles of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teachings does not go against the Vedas but, on the contrary, fulfills their purpose. His is a theological agenda based on a hermeneutics of truth and what he conceives—and what many Gauḍīyas would argue, directly perceives—to be the actual ontological construction of reality. For Kṛṣṇadāsa, Kṛṣṇa is real, and to invoke the authority of the Vedas in the service of Kṛṣṇa, who is their ultimate source and goal, is to act in perfect accord with the highest *dharma*: devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

### ENDNOTES

1. Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13-14. See also pp. 5-13 for an illuminating discussion on the defining characteristics of the term "Hinduism."

2. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, trans. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., ed. Tony K. Stewart (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

3. For a more nuanced discussion on the date of completion of the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*, see Dimock and Stewart's introduction to the text, *ibid.*, 29-31.

4. Barbara Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 12.

5. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 7.

6. See, for example, Mahābhārata 1.57.74; 12.327.18; Rāmāyaṇa 1.1.77; Skanda Purāṇa 5.3.1.18; Bhāgavata Purāṇa 1.4.20; 3.12.39.

7. Frederick M. Smith, "Purāṇaveda," in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. Laurie L. Patton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 97.

8. For a discussion of the mechanisms through which the category of Veda is extended to include not only *śruti* but also *smṛti* texts, see Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 7-12.

9. *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* 1.7.125; cf. CC 2.6.129; For other citations illustrating the implicit authority of the Vedas, see also CC 1.11.6, 1.17.149, 2.8.34, 2.9.179, 2.19.129. All translations in this essay are from Ed Dimock's translation of the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*.

10. CC 2.6.129; Caitanya speaking to Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya.

11. CC 2.6.152.

12. CC 1.7.101-104; Caitanya speaking to Advaita *saṁnyāsins*.

13. CC 2.6.129; Caitanya speaking to Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya.

14. Dimock's commentary to CC 1.7.104.

15. CC 1.7.101-104; Caitanya speaking to Advaita *saṁnyāsins*.



16. CC 1.7.106-107; Caitanya speaking to Advaitin *saṁnyāsins*.
17. Dimock's commentary to CC 1.7.106-107.
18. CC 1.7.114-120.
19. CC 1.7.110.
20. CC 1.7.111-113.
21. CC 1.7.121-123.
22. CC 1.7.124-126; cf. 2.6.122-130.
23. CC 1.7.131.
24. CC 1.7.133. *Cit-śakti* is a specific kind of *śakti* constituting the intrinsic nature of ultimate reality and consisting of additional differentiated *śaktis* that never come into contact with the phenomenal world of *prakṛti* (matter).
25. Dimock's commentary to CC 1.7.106-107.
26. CC 2.6.138-9.
27. CC 1.7.124.
28. CC 2.20.128, with *ślokas* 16-17, Bhāgavata Purāṇa 11.21.42-43. Cf. CC 3.7, *śloka* 12, Bhāgavata Purāṇa 10.47.61.
29. CC 2.24.229-230.
30. CC 1.4.23-24; cf. 2.20, *śloka* 13, Bhāgavata Purāṇa 11.14.20.
31. CC 1.4.143-146.
32. CC 2.8.177.
33. CC 2.6.211-212. cf. 2.11.104.
34. The *prasāda* in this instance was the food offered to, and blessed by, Jagannātha, who is accepted as a form of Kṛṣṇa in the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava tradition.
35. CC 2.25.75-84.
36. CC 2.25.110-111.

## BLUE LOTUSES EVERYWHERE: DIVINE LOVE IN GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVA AND CATHOLIC MYSTICISM

June McDaniel

In this paper, we shall look at some notions of mystical emotion in the tradition of Bengali or Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and in Catholic mysticism, especially of the medieval period. Both traditions are marked by the alternation of sorrow and joy, separation and union, which is experienced by the mystical worshipper. In both cases, there are ecstatic symptoms, and an emphasis on physical asceticism yet spiritual love is described with erotic metaphor, and a desire for both love and service. While these come from traditions with different theological assumptions, and within each tradition different mystics have their own ideas of the relationship between divine and human, there are still some areas of similarity which may be noted.

Of all Indian religious traditions, Hindu *bhakti* is often seen as closest to the Western religions because of its focus on the love of one, monotheistic deity. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* is sometimes understood to be alien to Western religion because of its erotic imagery and its acceptance of devotees sharing in divine experience. However, if we look at many writers from the Catholic mystical tradition, we see a great similarity of imagery, especially in the relationship between the soul and God.

In the Vaiṣṇava devotional or *bhakti* tradition of Bengal, love is the path to God. Rather than trying to eliminate emotion, as we might see in *rāja yoga*, the goal is to transform and intensify that emotion until it becomes powerful, overwhelming, the center of the devotee's being. There is a natural tendency for that love to increase, "as the ebb tide rises into high waves at the rising of the moon." Selfish human emotion is transformed into selfless divine emotion: it is boiled, thickened, purified, and redirected. Powerful

emotion can influence the deity's will, even bring him to earth, for only love can control Kṛṣṇa. However, the ideal form of love is selfless love or *prema*, a desire to serve and love Kṛṣṇa with one's whole heart and being, which is opposed to *kāma* or selfish love, in which Kṛṣṇa is served in order to gain one's own desires.

Such states of intense emotion are expressed in Vaiṣṇava tradition by ecstatic bodily changes (the *sāttvika bhāvas* or *sāttvika vikāras*). There are eight of these: trembling, shedding tears, paralysis, sweating, fainting, changing skin color, faltering voice and hair standing on end. These symptoms are understood to develop and intensify the emotions, and they are viewed as an extreme form of emotional expression (*anubhāva*).<sup>1</sup> The term *bhāva* is also used for the five basic roles or emotional relationships through which the devotee may relate to the deity: through friendship, parental love, service, peace, and erotic love. Among the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas, *bhāva* is an emotional ground from which rise subtler and more complex emotional states, especially the religious emotions.

In Catholic religious anthropology, the soul's most direct relation to God can be found through love. The human personality is traditionally divided into intellect and will (or, according to some medieval writers, intellect, will and memory). Intellect is the realm of knowledge, often corrupted into ignorance on earth, to be purified by concentration, spiritual knowledge, prayer and humility, while the will is the realm of emotion and attraction, often corrupted into the passions, to be purified by detachment, good actions, and faith in God. Love is the root passion, which should be transformed or trained. One should struggle against the passions and restrain them, and especially redirect them towards a divine end. In the mystical development of love and charity, sensual love is transformed into supernatural and divine love.

Ordinary love is based on the human mind and soul, but spiritual love is based on sanctifying grace, which enters into the soul and lifts it into the supernatural order. It brings the person closer towards perfection, the perfect love of God, which is the ultimate end of human life. The earlier stages of growth in love and resisting sin blossom into strengthening love which seeks total concentration and devotion towards God. While the disordered appetite seeks only the temporal good, the developed soul seeks heaven. As St. Augustine writes in his *City of God*, "self-love...has built the city of the world; the love of God, carried to the point of disdain for one's self, has constructed the city of God. The one glories in itself; the other glories in the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

Intense love of God may cause ecstatic states, such as trance, fainting (alienation of the senses), coldness or heat, self-forgetfulness, the wounds of love (such as stigmata), levitation, and flights of the spirit. The soul is sanctified by the operations of the Holy Spirit in infused contemplation, and mystical ecstasy (the *elevatio mentis* or the intimate union of the soul with God) leads to the alienation or suspension of the senses, which accompany the vehement state of love.<sup>3</sup>

Both Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava and medieval Catholic mystical traditions recognize the importance of divine love as a path to life's ultimate goal, which is total devotion to the deity. Both emphasize the necessity of transforming earthly love into heavenly love, the selfish into the selfless, the natural into the supernatural.

### Love in Union and Love in Separation

In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, Kṛṣṇa is not merely one god among others, but he is the primary and only true God, as in Western monotheism. He is the source of the millions of worlds, an ocean of mercy, of infinitely great power, the object of all worship, who controls all events and is omniscient. He is protecting, forgiving, firm in action, expert in everything, the creator of the good, almighty, superior to all in power, yet subdued by love.<sup>4</sup> Love of God, or Kṛṣṇa *prema*, is an intense state of love which includes the extremes of both joy and sorrow, and is only felt fully in the spiritual world.

In both Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava mysticism and Catholic mysticism, we see a God full of joy and sweetness, and the vision of God is experienced as blissful by the worshipper. However, this is rarely a continual vision; it tends to alternate with the state of loss and separation from God, when the soul yearns after the divine presence and is distraught with grief. The figure in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism who shows the most intense devotion is Rādhā, who represents the ultimate limit of the ecstatic state of love; she is said to be sunk in the deepest abyss of the ocean of love for her beloved Kṛṣṇa. Her joy is infinite in union with Kṛṣṇa, but when she is separated from him, she suffers unendurable pain, she is mad with love and seeks only death. Rādhā's state of separation, *viraha* or *vipralambha*, is the subject of many poems. In Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda*, Rādhā is prostrate from her loneliness:

She raises her sublime lotus face, clouded and streaked with tears

Like the moon dripping with nectar from cuts of the eclipse's teeth.

Lying dejected by your desertion, fearing Love's arrows,  
She clings to you in fantasy, Mādhava...

She evokes you in deep meditation to reach your distant form.  
She laments, laughs, collapses, cries, trembles, utters her pain.  
Lying dejected by your desertion, fearing Love's arrows,  
She clings to you in fantasy, Mādhava.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Rādhā and the *gopīs* mourn Kṛṣṇa's loss:

14. Some *gopīs* had their beauty withered by the heat from the agony of their hearts when they heard the news (of Kṛṣṇa leaving). Some were so grief-stricken and upset that their clothing and hair was dishevelled, and their bangles dropped (from their hands).

15. Some *gopīs* concentrated upon Kṛṣṇa so strongly that their senses cease[d], and they could no longer perceive the external world, as if they had reached the realm of the Supreme Self.

16. Other *gopīs* lost consciousness as they remembered Kṛṣṇa's wonderful words touching their hearts, and his warm, loving smiles.<sup>6</sup>

In Rūpa Goswāmin's *Uj्ज्वाला Nīlamanī* (*Blazing Sapphire*, a reference to the blue-skinned Kṛṣṇa), Rādhā's madness is emphasized:

She sometimes acts like a disappointed one, becoming angry and chastising the dark cloud. And sometimes she hurries to the trysting place and wanders about in the dense darkness. Distressed by the delusion of separation from you, what state has Rādhā not experienced?<sup>7</sup>

The poet Vidyāpati also wrote many poems along the theme of Rādhā's separation from Kṛṣṇa:

Kokilas call  
Startled, she wakes  
Only to brood again...  
Her arms grow thin,  
Her bracelets slide to the ground  
Rādhā's head droops in grief.  
Her fingers scar the earth  
Bleeding your name.<sup>8</sup>

Love in union may involve sudden or gradual love, love which is secret or

hidden, love with long embraces or with fear and shyness. Rāmānanda Rāya uses the image of secretly meeting the beloved amid sandalwood trees:

My moon-faced one  
 I am waiting  
     to make our bed ready  
     to gather lotus petals-  
 your body will press them,  
 hidden from even friendly eyes...  
 Come,  
 the sweet breeze from the sandalwoods  
 censes our trysting place...<sup>9</sup>

A similar mood is seen in St. John of the Cross' song of union with God, in which lover and beloved meet secretly in the dark night, beneath the cedar trees. The poem's full title is "Songs of the soul in rapture at having arrived at the height of perfection, which is union with God by the road of spiritual negation":

Upon a gloomy night  
 With all my cares to loving ardours flushed  
 (O venture of delight!)  
 With nobody in sight  
 I went abroad when all my house was hushed...  
 Within my flowering breast  
 Which only for himself entire I save  
 He sank into his rest  
 And all my gifts I gave  
 Lulled by the airs with which the cedars wave...<sup>10</sup>

The Rajput princess Mirā wrote many songs to her beloved Kṛṣṇa. Though she was not a Bengali, her poems are much appreciated by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. She describes the mood of separation:

To love one  
     not earthly  
 this is the root  
     of pain, my friend.  
 He will speak

—oh, so sweetly!  
 then snap love  
 like a jasmine stem.  
 Says Meera,  
 devoutly  
 the thorn of waiting  
 pierces without end.<sup>11</sup>

The mood of union is joyful and contemplative:

My love  
 he is here  
 inside  
 He does not leave  
 he doesn't  
 need to arrive.  
 Says Meera, I gaze  
 at the path day and night.<sup>12</sup>

We also see both separation and union in some Catholic mystics, who tend to speak of purgation and illumination, or the abyss or wilderness and the garden. St. Umilta of Faenza speaks of the state of separation in her "Discourse on Weeping and Lamentation." In this case, it is she herself who has been deserted by her Savior:

You know and remember that by grace I was elevated almost to heaven, and now I felt myself precipitated into the abyss. From the highest mountains I descended into the dark shadowy valley. The great treasure that had been given to me as a precious vessel has fallen. I saw myself rich before and now I am poor....Gold and silver have turned into tin that bends, my mind that penetrated the heavens with its rapid flight toward the throne of the queen now no longer knows how to fly and is tied to the low places of the earth....My hands that were lifted on high invoking and blessing God, fall exhausted on earthly things....O unhappy me, and more than desolate! Abandoned to the waves, my grief is greater than the sea itself.<sup>13</sup>

Like Rādhā, she calls for her love to come to her:

O my sweetest Christ, who are my only hope, come to me, and do not delay. Visit my heart that has such need of divine love. Fill it with divine

grace, and cause my mind and my soul to be joined and burn always in you who are flame without smoke, wholly resplendent. Draw near to me with your love, o most exquisite fire that makes fruitful...my heart asks of you only the seed of love, which immediately increases and gives the best fruit. I beg of you only love....When you are with me and I feel your power, my heart is merry and leaps with joy, my mind adorns itself with flowers of great beauty, and my soul dreams in the sweetness of blessed love....But if I do not possess you, I am like the whale that when the tide goes out sits on the sand and is condemned to death, because without the tide she no longer has the chance to escape.<sup>14</sup>

Lamenting her isolation, Mechthild of Magdeburg in "The Flowing Light of the Godhead" is the deserted lover. She uses the metaphor of the Bride in the *Song of Songs*, and contemplates divine desertion through the figure of the Bride of God. This metaphor of the worshipper contemplating the deserted Bride is reminiscent of the devotee who contemplates Vṛndāvana through the image of the deserted Rādhā:

Thus speaks the Bride of God who has dwelt in the enclosed sanctuary of the Holy Trinity—"Away from me all ye creatures! Ye pain me and cannot comfort me!" And the creatures ask, "Why?" The Bride says, "My Love has left me while I rested beside him and slept." But the creatures ask, "Can this beautiful world and all your blessings not comfort you?" "Nay," says the Bride.... "Can even the Kingdom of Heaven not comfort you?" ask the creatures. "Nay! it were dead in itself were the living God not there!"<sup>15</sup>

When the mystic attains union with God, it brings a blissful sweetness which is metaphorically tasted, as Vaiṣṇava *rasa* is often described in terms of taste and sweetness. St. Marguerite d'Oingt states:

God is the highest joy, and there is no delight nor honest joy that does not come from him. He is the sweet electuary in which are all delicious flavors. He is so good that for those who taste him, the more they receive the greater will be their hunger, and they will not dare to desire anything other than the sweetness which they re-experience in him.<sup>16</sup>

These states of separation and union in Catholic mysticism are associated with the states of purgation and illumination, which lead towards the ultimate union of love. In the state of purgation, the devotee is without God,



and life is dry and arid. He or she is tempted to sin, for there is no divine blessing, and the person becomes thin and emaciated through mortification of the flesh. For St. John of the Cross, the purgative period included both the dark night of the senses, and the dark night of the spirit. In the night of the senses, there is darkness, pain, a lack of joy or enthusiasm. It is a crisis of the senses which is given by God to develop a higher kind of love. In the night of the spirit, the soul feels hopeless, eternally separated from God, in anguish and despair. It makes the soul burn like fire, so that it comes forth resplendent and beautiful. The soul's happiness is turned to despair, as St. John describes the worshippers in this state:

When they are going about these spiritual exercises with the greatest delight and pleasure, and when they believe that the sun of divine favor is shining most brightly upon them, God turns all this light of theirs into darkness and shuts against them the door and the source of the sweet spiritual water which they were tasting in God whenever and for as long as they desired....And thus he leaves them so completely in the dark that they know not whither to go with their sensible imagination and meditation, for they cannot advance a step in meditation, as they were accustomed to do before, their inward senses being submerged in this night....<sup>17</sup>

In the state of illumination, which may follow purgation or alternate with it, the person becomes interested only in God, and not in the physical world. There is continual thought of God and heaven, and contemplation of God becomes as natural as breathing. Purgation leads to the development of the internal senses (especially imagination and memory) and encourages the transformation of sensual love into spiritual love, and natural into supernatural.

### Divine Service

In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, service to Kṛṣṇa is an important ideal. The goal is to participate in the *Vṛndāvana-līlā*, to become a servant or handmaiden to the divine couple, a friend or confidante, though never a deity oneself. The devotee has the desire to perceive God, and to please him—even through the heavenly equivalent of serving food and drink. The devotee seeks to serve the divine couple, facilitating their meetings and helping them in their secret relationship. He or she may pass messages between the lovers,

bring food or flowers or betel, arrange the meeting-place or Rādhā's jewelry and ornaments. The soul may become a companion or handmaiden (*mañjarī*) of Rādhā, or in some visualizations a friend of Kṛṣṇa, through the bestowal of such a spiritual body in initiation, or by the realization of this identity as a pre-existing and eternal one.

To help in God's divine play, the devotee should meditate in the mood of divine romantic love (*madhura rasa*). This feeling of love reaches the greatest possible depth of emotion, and through it an intimate personal tie is established between Kṛṣṇa and the devotee. There is no distance, and no hesitation, between worshipper and worshipped. The close personal relationship is accompanied by intimate personal service, which contributes to Kṛṣṇa's bliss. Only devotees who follow the path of *madhura-rasa* can serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the heavenly groves (*kuñja-sevā*).<sup>18</sup> However, in this case love is not enough. The devotee must take on a divine body, and be instructed in proper behavior.

When the devotee has gained a large measure of selfless love, giving up the paths of wisdom and action and following only devotion, he or she gains a spiritual body or "soul." Such a soul is not automatic for all humans, as are souls in Christianity. This soul must be given and taught. In the *mañjarī sādhana*, it is in the form of a young girl, a handmaiden of Rādhā's friends. In this new soul-body, which is bright, young, beautiful, immortal, and without desire or passion, the devotee can perform inner service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. A physical body can perform outer service (such as listening to Vaiṣṇava scriptures and reciting Kṛṣṇa's praises and activities) but a non-physical body is needed to perform service for heavenly deities. In this service, the heart of the devotee overflows with bliss, like a current of the Yamunā River. When Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are together, devotion and love are said to create a shoreless ocean of bliss; when they are apart, the feelings are like an ocean of melancholy.

Such spiritual bodies add to the complexity and beauty of Kṛṣṇa's playful manifestation or *līlā*. He takes on many dramatic roles, which make the flirtations of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa more varied and eternally new. Vaiṣṇava literature speaks of his pretending to be a tax collector and taxing Rādhā on the milk that she is taking to market, his disguise as a boatman for ferrying Rādhā across the river, even his disguise as the goddess Kālī. Such various roles add to the *rasa*, the aesthetic taste, of the drama, and make it sweet to the devotee.

In Catholic mysticism, spiritual love often gives human souls the

desire to serve God, as St. Francis de Sales states:

There are two principal exercises of our love of God: one affective and the other effective or active, as St. Bernard says. By the first we are attached to God and to everything that pleases him; by the second we serve God and we do whatever he commands. The former unites us to the goodness of God, the latter makes us do the will of God....The one makes us take pleasure in God; the other makes us please God.<sup>19</sup>

Many mystics have had visions of such divine service, such as Julian of Norwich shows in the allegorical vision of God in her "Showings":

I saw the lord sitting in state, and the servant standing respectfully before his lord....inwardly, there was shown in him a foundation of love, the love which he had for the lord, which was equal to the love which the lord had for him....he made all this food ready as he knew was pleasing to the lord; and then he was to take this food, and drink, and carry it most reverently before the lord....I saw in the lord that he has in himself endless life and every kind of goodness....But it was not wholly to his honour until his servant had prepared it so finely and carried it before him into the lord's own presence.<sup>20</sup>

Catholic mysticism does not speak specifically of the roles of God, or of the sweet aesthetic emotion (*madhura-rasa*), but it does speak of the love of Christ in the form of a Bridegroom. Bernard of Clairvaux speaks of the roles of God; and the feeling (cf. *bhāva*) which is highest is that of marital love, especially the love of the Bride for the Bridegroom. In his sermon on the *Song of Songs*, he states:

God demands to be feared, as Lord; to be honoured, as Father; as Bridegroom, to be loved. Which of these is the highest, which the noblest? Love, we cannot doubt. Without love, fear hath torment and honour hath no grace. Fear is servile, so long as love set it not free, and honour which flows not out from love is not honour but flattery. Truly honour and glory are due to God alone; but God will not accept of either, unless they be seasoned with the honey of love....A great reality is love, if only it return to its source, if it be restored again to its first beginning, if it be poured back into its fount and ever drawn therefrom whence it perpetually flows.<sup>21</sup>

Bernard also speaks in this sermon of selfless love, the love of the Bride,

which is the model of love for mankind:

Love then is a great reality; but there are degrees of love, and highest of all stands the bride. Children love their fathers, but they are thinking about the inheritance they expect to get, and so long as they are afraid that somehow they may lose it, their respect for their father is the greater and their love for him the less....Pure love is not mercenary. Pure love does not draw its strength from hope, nor is it injured by distrust. This is the love that the bride has; for all and everything she is, is this. All her being, all her hope, is love and love alone. The bride overflows with love, and therewith the bridegroom is content.<sup>22</sup>

We see a similar sort of imagery in Bernard of Clairvaux's commentary on the same text, in which the "friend of the Bridegroom," who is the "soul's angel" brings the soul and God as Bridegroom together. He witnesses the joy of the divine couple, and "participates in their gladness and bliss:"

He is everywhere the soul's tireless attendant, never ceasing to lure it on and guide it with constant inspirations, as he whispers: "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desire of your heart;" and again: "Wait for the Lord and keep his way." Or: "If he seems slow, wait for him; he will surely come, he will not delay..." This loyal groomsman, watching without envy over this interchange of love, seeks the Lord's glory rather than his own; he is the go-between for the lover and his beloved, making known the desires of one, bearing the gifts of the other. He quicken's the soul's affections, he conciliates the Bridegroom. Sometimes too, though rarely, he brings them into each other's presence, either snatching her up to him, or leading him down to her....<sup>23</sup>

As Bernard's Bride overflows with love, so does Kṛṣṇa's unwedded bride, Rādhā. She is an ocean of love, holding within her so much passion that even Kṛṣṇa is amazed. Kṛṣṇa's direct relationship is only with her, and secondarily with the *gopīs*, though servants bring them together and counsel patience if one of the couple is late. The handmaiden or confidante of Rādhā will share Rādhā's feelings of sadness and sweetness, and help their relationship without envy. She seeks to have only Rādhā's and Kṛṣṇa's good in her mind, and to think of nothing else.

As Kṛṣṇa takes on many roles through which to play with Rādhā, Christ takes on roles in Catholic mysticism as well. As Bernard of Clairvaux states in his commentary on the *Song of Songs*:

For the various desires of the soul it is essential that the taste of God's presence be varied too, and that the infused flavor of divine delight should titillate in manifold ways the palate of the soul that seeks him. You must already have noticed how often he changes his countenance in the course of this love-song, how he delights in transforming himself from one charming guise to another in the beloved's presence: at one moment like a bashful bridegroom manoeuvring for the hidden embraces of his holy lover, for the bliss of her kisses; at another coming along like a physician with oil and ointments, because weak and tender souls still need remedies and medicines of this kind, which is why they are rather daintily described as maidens....sometimes, too, he joins up as a traveller with the bride and the maidens who accompany her on the road, and lightens the hardships of the journey for the whole company by his fascinating conversation, so that when he was parted from them they ask: "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road?" A silver-tongued companion who, by the spell of his words and manners, persuades everyone, as if in a sweet-smelling cloud arising from the ointments, to follow him. Hence they say: "We will run after you...."<sup>24</sup>

This is reminiscent of the *gopīs* of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, who are fascinated by Kṛṣṇa's roles and skills. In both religious traditions, it is love that precedes knowledge, and love of God which is more important than knowledge of God.

### Vision and Emotion

Both Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and Catholic mysticism have traditions of visualization (the Biblical visions described in St. Ignatius' spiritual exercises in his *Manresa* and the visualization of scenes from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other sources in the practices of *bhakti sādhana*), though ideally one's vision of paradise is spontaneous and a divine gift rather than consciously visualized. Both traditions assume that the human may interact with the divine, though in different ways. Catholic mysticism tends to focus on the direct participation of the worshipper in God's love for humanity and for the individual human soul, while the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava approach emphasizes witnessing or sharing emotionally in the divine dramas. While both direct participation and indirect sharing are possible, the tendency is for the devotees to witness the interaction of major figures, or become involved as minor participants.

In the *Śrī Bhṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛtam*, Sanātana Gosvāmī discusses perception of the heavenly play. Contemplation and devotion are important, for God can only be seen by devotional eyes. Bhagavān (God) is invisible to ordinary physical eyes (Kāṁsa and Duryodhana, for example, could not recognize Kṛṣṇa's divinity). The heavenly drama can appear in the heart during meditation, and some persons meditating on it can take on the particular form of the deity on which they meditate. He also notes that the landscape of the heavenly world of Vaikuṇṭha is not composed of ordinary plants and animals, but rather of conscious beings. The animals, birds, trees, and vines are all eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa, who have taken on phenomenal forms through which to serve him. Thus they watch Kṛṣṇa's play eternally.<sup>25</sup>

Envisioning the realms of the divine is important in both traditions, involving the spiritual senses and an ascetic way of life. Both traditions have worshippers who are outwardly renunciant but inwardly loving, taking vows of poverty and practicing austerities (such as fasting, vigils, branding, wandering or wearing hair shirts) as signs of devotion. Both traditions have individuals who show special ability or favor from God. In Catholicism, the saints have visions of heaven, show divine presence through the stigmata, and can have the vision of the light of glory (though all writers affirm that this is rare, and that during one's life the light is usually veiled). In Bengali Vaiṣṇavism, there are *siddhas* who can have visions of Goloka: the *svarūpa siddha*, whose divine eyes are gradually opened, and the *vastu siddha*, who is taken directly to Goloka by Kṛṣṇa's grace.<sup>26</sup>

Such visions arise in spiritual practice (*sādhana*), when the devotee consciously develops spiritual love, and the body to hold that love. The *Bhakti-rasāmṛtasindhu* has the devotee begin with ritual action (*vaidhī bhakti*) and progress to ritual emotion (*rāgānugā bhakti*). Through physical action and imaginative visualization, the devotee builds a soul, a spiritual body composed of love, which can experience emotion more intensely than can the ordinary personality. The *bhāva* becomes deepened, and the heart is softened. Emotion becomes intense love (*prema*), and there is continual focus of attention on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the divine couple. The highest state, called the greatest emotion (*mahābhāva*), has the person experience all possible emotions simultaneously, including the opposite emotions of separation and union, in passionate delirium (*mādana*). As O.B.L. Kapoor states,

*Mādana* has the unique capacity of directly experiencing a thousand different kinds of enjoyment of union with Kṛṣṇa....it presents these multi-

farious experiences of union simultaneously with multifarious experiences of separation (*viyoga*) involving craving (*utkaṇṭha*) for union.<sup>27</sup>

The "ladder of emotion" includes *sneha*, a thickening of spiritual love (when the emotion gains a consistency and taste like clarified butter or honey); *māna*, or sulking and hiding emotion; *pranaya* or deep sharing and confidence; *rāga* or intense passion (also defined as being totally concentrated upon the desired object); *anurāga*, in which the beloved appears eternally new; and *mahābhāva*, the experience of emotion so intense and complex that all extremes of emotion are felt at once. In the orthodox Bengali Vaiṣṇava tradition, only Rādhā may experience the state of *mahābhāva*, though her companions and their handmaidens may share in her emotional states. Indeed, these handmaidens or *mañjarīs* are sometimes said to feel Rādhā's emotions one hundred times more intensely than she does, for they are not as personally involved (selflessness is understood to increase sensitivity to the divine).<sup>28</sup> The devotee may also share in these states by visualizing the situations in which they occur.<sup>29</sup>

Some Catholic mystics have spoken of degrees of emotion, such as Richard of St. Victor. As he states in his "The Four Degrees of Passionate Charity," the soul thirsts for divine sweetness and ends in service:

In the first degree the soul thirsts for God, in the second she thirsts to go to God, in the third she thirsts to be in God, in the fourth she thirsts in God's way. She thirsts for God when she desires to experience what that inward sweetness is that inebriates the mind of man, when she begins to taste and see how sweet the Lord is....She thirsts in God, when in ecstasy she desires to pass over into God altogether, so that having wholly forgotten herself she may truly say: "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell." She thirsts in God's way when, by her own will, I do not mean in temporal matters only but also in spiritual things, the soul reserves nothing for her own will but commits all things to God, never thinking about herself but about the things of Jesus Christ, so that she may say: "I came not to do my own will but the will of the Father which is in heaven."<sup>30</sup>

However, spiritual love in Catholic mysticism is usually described as an attraction which is essentially transformative. As Richard Rolle states in "The Fire of Love," the worshipper is transformed into the image of God:

The peace known by lovers of Christ comes from their heart[s] being fixed, in longing and in thought, in the love of God; it is a peace that

sings and loves and burns and contemplates. Very sweet indeed is the quiet that the spirit experiences. Music, divine and delectable, comes to rejoice it; the mind is rapt in sublime and gay melody and sings the delights of everlasting love. Now from human lips sounds forth again the praise of God; the praise, too, of the Blessed Virgin in whom he glories beyond measure. This need occasion no surprise, for the heart of the singer is altogether ablaze with heavenly fire. And he is transformed into the likeness of Him in Whom is all melody and song and is transported by loving desire for the taste of heaven. A man overflows with inner joy, and his very thought sings as he rejoices in the warmth of his love....Moreover, when he has once had experience of that great thing ...he knows that when it is missing he is never at ease, but is always pining for love.<sup>31</sup>

In both traditions, the soul tends to be seen as feminine, both following the mystical dictum "Before God, all souls are female." In Catholicism, the nuns are the brides of Christ, while in Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism, souls intentionally take on feminine identities. However, in both cases the women beloved by God are understood to feel devotional rather than sensual love, and they represent some spark or aspect of God returning to the source (in the case of Rādhā, she is Kṛṣṇa's *hlādinī śakti* or power of bliss).

For both traditions, the image of the woman yearning after her lost lover is an archetypal image of the relationship of the soul and God. Whether it is the Bride of God in the *Song of Songs*, or Rādhā in the songs of the Vaiṣṇava poets, the yearnings of the soul and its emotional extremes are eventually stilled, and the presence of the Divine Lover realized.

However, it may be noted that not all romances between the divine lover and beloved are quite so tumultuous. As Teresa of Avila states in "The Interior Castle," the worshipper may undergo both spiritual marriage, which is permanent, and spiritual betrothal, which is temporary and alternates:

But what passes in the union of the spiritual marriage is very different. The Lord appears in the centre of the soul, not through an imaginary, but through an intellectual vision....This instantaneous communication of God to the soul is so great a secret and so sublime a favour, and such a delight is felt by the soul, that I do not know with what to compare it, beyond saying that the Lord is pleased to manifest to the soul at the moment the glory that is in heaven, in a sublimer manner than is possible through any vision or spiritual consolation....For he has been



pleased to unite Himself with his creature in such a way that they have become like two who cannot be separated from one another; even so he will not separate Himself from her.

The Spiritual Betrothal is different: here the two persons are frequently separated, as is the case with union, for, although by union is meant the joining of two things into one, each of the two, as is a matter of common observation, can be separated and remain a thing by itself. This favour of the Lord passes quickly and afterwards the soul is deprived of that companionship—I mean so far as it can understand. In this other favour of the Lord it is not so; the soul remains all the time in that centre with its God.<sup>32</sup>

From this perspective, the passionate and ever-changing love of the *Song of Songs*, and also the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, would represent the spiritual betrothal rather than the spiritual marriage. This would fit well with the Vaiṣṇava idealization of non-marital (*parakīyā*) love, in which the married partner is considered to be less vital and attractive than the consort to whom one is not married.

### Similarities and Differences

Both of these traditions show related themes of erotic and romantic imagery in the relationship between the soul and God. By means of the Vaiṣṇava figure of Rādhā, and the mystical Catholic figure of the Bride of the *Song of Songs*, the worshipper is able to perceive and, to varying extents, share in the greatest intensity of divine love.

There are some significant areas of similarity. In both cases, the emotion of love leads to salvation, understood as entry into the world of heaven. Both emphasize passion towards God and selfless love, and make use of visualization techniques which are understood as a foretaste of the heavenly world to come. Both use imagery of the relationship between male and female, and the alternation of separation from God and union with him as the basis of both earthly and heavenly religious passion. Both speak of the extremes of love, and the ecstatic symptoms which arise from them.

However, there are also some important areas of difference. One is in the conception of heaven. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava heaven is a world of form, like the earthly Vṛndāvana, and it is a structured and embodied place. There are gardens, groves, lakes and rivers, and Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with their many relatives, companions and servants. The Catholic heaven is a

world of light, with a central throne and hierarchies of angels. However, there is no consistent theology which describes it, but it is generally understood to be essentially formless and abstract, with its triune God and angels beyond human understanding or perception.

A second area is the idea of service. Both traditions emphasize service, but in different ways. In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, one serves the deities in heavenly Vṛndāvana, as a companion or handmaiden. In Catholic tradition, one serves God by serving humanity; though the imagery of the heavenly servant is present, it is human service which is emphasized in Catholic theology.

Another area of difference is in direct versus mediated perception of the divine. In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought, Kṛṣṇa does not come to the individual devotee as a lover, even if the devotee has a female spiritual body and is a *gopī* or *mañjarī*. Instead, the devotee experiences his love in a mediated and indirect fashion, sharing in the emotion of Rādhā (or in some traditions, in Caitanya's feelings of Rādhā's feelings). In this tradition, divine light must be seen through the prism of personality if it is to be appreciated, through the heart of the perfect lover, whose love is then experienced within the devotee's heart. The devotee is not himself or herself involved in a spiritual marriage.

In Catholic mysticism, such love may be mediated through the compassionate love of Mary, or through the passionate love of the Bride of the *Song of Songs*, but the worshipper may also have a direct relationship with Christ. Nuns become directly brides of Christ, and many female saints have had visions of divine betrothals and marriages with God. It may be noted that if these are to be considered legitimate, Christ has many wives or consorts—certainly greater in number than Kṛṣṇa's *gopī* consorts. While Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotees experience a more subtle love of Kṛṣṇa through the heart of Rādhā, Catholic mysticism allows for a more direct and less mediated love of Christ. Both traditions describe a God who is both incarnate and an eternal mystery.

For both mystical paths, the goal is the eternal state when the divine becomes visible:

Blue lotuses  
Flower everywhere  
And black kokilas sing...  
King of the seasons,

Spring has come  
 And wild with longing  
 The bee goes to his love.  
 Birds flight in the air  
 And cowherd-girls  
 Smile face to face...  
 Krishna has entered  
 The great forest.<sup>33</sup>

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> They differ from *anubhāvas* in that the *sāttvika bhāvas* are composed only of *sattva guṇa*, and as such are purely spiritual emotions. There may be one or two at a time, or more than five may manifest themselves at once (in this case, the *sāttvika bhāvas* are said to be blazing or *uddīpta*). While some of these may be caused by other events (such as sweating caused by heat or fear), the more of these bodily changes appear, the greater the likelihood that the person is experiencing intense emotion.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV, chap.28, cited in Royo, p. 322. (See note 3).

<sup>3</sup> A good discussion of the nature of ecstasy is found in Antonio Royo and Jordan Aumann, *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Dubuque: The Priory Press, 1962), pp. 551-553.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kṛṣṇa as described by Guru Goswami in Thakur Bhakti Vinode, *Jaiva Dharma*, (Madras: Gauḍiṃya Math, 1975), p. 415.

<sup>5</sup> *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, ed. and trans. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, trans. G. V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), X.39.14-16. Rephrased. Though Rādhā's name is not mentioned in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, she is generally understood to have been present among the *gopīs* by Gauḍiṃya Vaiṣṇavas.

<sup>7</sup> Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Śrī Śrī Ujjvala-Nīlamanī*, ed. in Bengali translation by Viṣṇudāsa Gosvāmin (Navadvīpa: Haridāsa Dāsa, 497 Gaurābda), p. 127; 14.193.

<sup>8</sup> *Love Songs of Vidyapati*, trans. Deben Bhattacharya (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1969), p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> From Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and Denise Levertov, trans. *In Praise of Krishna: Songs from the Bengali* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> St. John of the Cross, "Songs of the soul..." translated by Allison Peers, in F.C. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and An Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin

Books, 1986), p. 357-358.

<sup>11</sup> Shama Futehally, trans. *Songs of Meera: In the Dark of the Heart* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> St. Umilta of Faenza, "Sermons," in Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> "In Honor of Jesus Christ," Ibid., pp. 251-252.

<sup>15</sup> Mechthild of Magdeburg, "Flowing Light of the Godhead," in *Silent Fire: An Invitation to Western Mysticism*, ed. Walter Holden Capps and Wendy M. Wright (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> St. Marguerite d'Oingt, "The Mirror of St. Marguerite d'Oingt," in Petroff, op. cit., p. 293.

<sup>17</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Book I, Chap. 8, cited in Royo, op. cit., p. 330.

<sup>18</sup> Narenda Nath Law, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Caitanya* (London: Luzac and Co. 1949), p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Chap. 6, cited in Royo, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>20</sup> Julian of Norwich, "Showings" in Petroff, op. cit., pp. 310-311.

<sup>21</sup> St Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermons on the Song of Songs" 83.4, in F. C. Happold, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>22</sup> St Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermons on the Song of Songs," ibid., pp. 240-241.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Song of Songs" from *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. III, in Capps and Wright, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Song of Songs," ibid., pp. 51-52.

<sup>25</sup> Sanātana Gosvāmī, *Sri Brihat Bhagavatamritam*, trans., Bhakti Prajnan Yati Maharaj (Madras: Sree Gaudiya Math, 1975), p. 166.

<sup>26</sup> Thakur Bhakti Vinode, *Jaiva Dharma*, op. cit., p. 442.

<sup>27</sup> See O.B.L. Kapoor, *The Philosophy and Religion of Śrī Caitanya* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977), p. 210.

<sup>28</sup> According to the *Govinda-līlāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāj, the companions (*sakhīs*) of Rādhā are "like flowers and buds of the vine of love which is Rādhā," and when Rādhā experiences the joy of Krishna's love, her companions' experience of that joy is one hundred times greater than her own. Because they are detached from ego and desire, they are more open to deeper forms of love, and can experience these intensely. Thus, detachment (from ego and desire) paradoxically leads to intensity.

<sup>29</sup> There are special meditations which lead to experience of these intense emotional states. In the *mañjarī sādhana*, the devotee identifies himself with one of Rādhā's handmaidens, while in the *gaura-līlā sādhana*, he identifies himself with the servants of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Bengali saint believed by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to be a joint incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.

<sup>30</sup> Richard of St. Victor, "The Four Degrees of Passionate Charity" in Happold, op. cit., pp. 242-243.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Rolle, "The Fire of Love" from his *The Fire of Love* in Capps, op. cit., pp. 91-92. Some Christian writers believe that manikind was originally created in the image of God, but that this image was lost in the fall from Eden. Here that state is returned to the soul through mystical vision.

<sup>32</sup> Teresa of Avila, "The Interior Castle" in Capps, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

<sup>33</sup> Vidyāpati, *Love Songs...*, op. cit., p. 89.

## SACRED RAPTURE: THE BHAKTI-RASA THEORY OF RŪPA GOSVĀMIN

Neal Delmonico

Few conceptions are as difficult to understand in the religious universe of Caitanya Mahāprabhu's Vaiṣṇavism as *bhakti-rasa*. One might correctly claim, however, that the *bhakti-rasa* experience is the 'fountain of life' from which the movement started by Śrī Caitanya five hundred years ago has repeatedly rejuvenated itself. Śrī Caitanya himself tasted *bhakti-rasa*, as all of his biographers attest, and brought his associates into the ken of that experience as well. *Bhakti-rasa* constituted Mahāprabhu's primary religious experience. Moreover, the cultivation of *bhakti-rasa* has immeasurably enriched the Vaiṣṇava tradition through encouraging the composition of numerous works of poetry, plays, songs, proto-novels, etc.<sup>1</sup> The quest for *bhakti-rasa* is the quest of the follower of Śrī Caitanya, which leads him into the world of Vaiṣṇava association, practice and ritual, and which gives him the strength to overcome the distractions and allurements presented by an undisciplined mind in a chaotic world. Finally, *bhakti-rasa* delivers him into the realm of his aspirations, the eternal Vṛndāvana where Kṛṣṇa himself is engaged in enjoying *rasa* with his eternal associates. As a measure of the importance of *rasa* in Caitanya's Vaiṣṇavism, it may be noted that it is *rasa* which, in effect, establishes Kṛṣṇa as the tradition's major object of worship. The chief *rasa* theorist of the tradition, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmin, confirms this in his monumental *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. He says,

Though from the point of view of philosophy (theology or dogma), the Lord of Śrī (Nārāyaṇa) and Kṛṣṇa are nondifferent. *Rasa* reveals the form of Kṛṣṇa to be the most excellent. This is the position of *rasa*.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible within the limits of a short essay to give a full treatment of *bhakti-rasa*. *Rasa* is a vast and complex topic, the proper discussion of which would require nothing less than a full-length book. Here only a brief description of the *bhakti-rasa* theory of Śrī Rūpa will be attempted along with an outline of its background in the earlier Sanskrit aesthetic traditions. In this endeavor, an attempt must be made to distinguish *bhakti-rasa* from the aesthetic *rasa* of Sanskrit poetics. The author hopes in this way to lay a foundation for further study of this important and interesting topic and to contribute by means of some of the concepts discussed here, towards phenomenology of religious feeling.

*Rasa* is a concept that cannot easily be translated into English. Nevertheless, various scholars have characterized it as 'aesthetic-experience, -pleasure, -rapture, -relish., -sentiment, etc.' All of these terms capture some aspect of the conception of *rasa* but none of them cover all of its facets. Rather than try to find an equivalent for *rasa* in English or to attempt a definition of the concept at the outset, it is best to allow its various facets emerge in the course of the description that follows.

Speculation on *rasa* dates back to very early times in India. The Upaniṣads (6th-2nd century BC) abound with the term. The famous passage from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, *raso vai saḥ, rasam hyevāyam labdhvānandī bhavati*,<sup>3</sup> is often quoted as a Vedic authority for the *rasa* experience.<sup>4</sup> The *rasa* referred to in this passage, however, is certainly not the technical *rasa* of the much later aestheticians. Yet, the later concept of *rasa* owes something to this early idea, for the *rasa* in the Upaniṣadic passage means joy (*ānanda*) and joy or pleasure is one of the major components of the concept of aesthetic *rasa*. Aesthetic speculations on *rasa* attempted to discover why art, specifically poetry and drama, causes pleasure in men of taste.

The earliest technical usage of the word is found in Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* (4th or 5th century CE). The discussion as it is found in the pages of Bharata reveals the concept already fairly advanced and all of the major terminology of the theory already developed. Thus the theory must have been evolving for some time before the composition of the *Nāṭya-śāstra*. Bharata's discussion of *rasa* occupies the sixth chapter of his work and his discussion of *bhāva*, or emotion, the seventh. These two chapters of Bharata's text are partly augmented by the masterful commentary of Abhinavagupta (10th century CE). These texts provide the materials for a study of the early history of the *rasa* theory. Abhinavagupta, in addition, may be credited with giving the *rasa* theory its classical formulation, a formulation which for the

most part, stood up through the time of the last great aesthetic theorist, Jagannātha Paṇḍita (17th century CE).

What then does Bharata say about *rasa*? Bharata first of all establishes the great importance of *rasa* with his statement, *na hi rasād ṛte kaścid arthaḥ pravartate*, "Without *rasa* no meaning prevails."<sup>5</sup> In this way Bharata justifies taking up *rasa* first among all of the various topics of dramaturgy. His next statement is the famous *rasa-sūtra* which is the kernel of the *rasa* theory and which sparked off numerous commentarial debates over the following centuries. The *rasa-sūtra* is: *vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicārī-saṁyogād rasa-niṣpattiḥ*, "*Rasa* is produced from the union of the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicārīs*."<sup>6</sup> Abhinavagupta's long commentary on this *sūtra* introduces us to the history of the debate over the meaning of this *sūtra*. He concludes after astutely critiquing his predecessors' theories with his own theory which includes the best parts of the earlier discussions.

In the simplest terms, when, in a play or poem, a young man and young woman are depicted in a romantic setting such as a moonlit garden (*vibhāvas*), when they cast furtive glances at each other and tremble on touching each other (*anubhāvas*) and when other fleeting emotions such as shyness, euphoria or jealousy (*vyabhicārīs*) are portrayed in them, discerning members of the audience become aware of the existence of love (*rati*). The pleasure produced in a sympathizing (*sahṛdaya*) member of the audience when all of these elements are in conjunction is called *rasa*, in this case *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, the erotic sentiment. This, in its lowest common denominator form, is the *rasa* theory. Needless to say, the theory raised a number of questions and posed a series of problems, the details of which, though extremely interesting, need not occupy us here.

Though the *sūtra* uses the word *niṣpatti* (production) to characterize the origin of *rasa*, Abhinavagupta argues that *rasa* is not produced but manifested (*abhivyakta*) when the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicārīs* are perceived in conjunction by the sympathetic aesthete. The *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicārīs* form the content of a play or poem. In everyday life they are the causes, the effects and the companion emotions of a handful of dominant emotions called *sthāyibhāvas*, or lasting emotions. When, however, these are portrayed in the unreal world of drama or poetry, they act to manifest *rasa*, and because of this action and their unreal nature they are distinguished from their everyday counterparts by the technical terms *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicārī*. The unreal world of art short circuits the ordinary process of the arousal of emotions in the discerning man of taste



and, instead, awakens subtle mental impressions (*vāsanās*) created by previous emotional experiences which lie dormant within his mind. Simultaneous with this bringing into consciousness of old *vāsanās* is a relaxation of self-identity which takes place in the aesthete while experiencing art. He sees before him an actor in a play, say, whose acting and costume presents the illusion that he is the character the play is about. The awarenesses, 'this is an actor' and 'this is Rāma (the character of the play),' arise simultaneously in the mind of the viewer of a play. The awareness, 'this is an actor,' represents the time and place of the aesthete sitting in the theater watching the play. The awareness, 'this is Rāma,' represents the time and place presented in the play. These two contradictory awarenesses under certain circumstances cancel each other while the *vibhāvas*, etc., represented in the play awaken the past impression of a dominant emotion.

Thus the aesthete, freed from his own limited identity, experiences a generalized form of the dominant emotion, i.e., an emotion not tied to either the present nor to the time represented in the play and not localized in any limited person. What remains after the aesthete's liberation from his circumstances is his consciousness (*saṁvit*) colored by the emotional *vāsanā* which was brought into experience by the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicārīs*. This, for Abhinavagupta, is *rasa*.<sup>7</sup>

*Rasa*, therefore, cannot be said to be 'created' or 'produced' because its elements, consciousness and the dormant *vāsanās* are already in existence. The process of aesthetic contemplation described above merely uncovers or manifests them. Furthermore, *rasa* is always a pleasurable experience because inherent in this consciousness, freed from all objects and adjuncts, with the exception of the tinge of generalized emotion, is joy (*ānanda*).

One other technical term remains to be discussed. This is the term *sthāyibhāva*, which has been translated as the dominant or lasting emotion, but is moreover a term introduced to distinguish the major or primary emotion in a work of art from everyday emotions (called simply *bhāvas*) as in the case of *vibhāvas*, etc. *Sthāyibhāvas* are distinguished from the *vyabhicārīs* because they are more enduring, of greater depth and power than the *vyabhicārīs*. Thus, in one place Bharata compares the *sthāyīs* with kings and the *vyabhicārīs* with the followers of kings.<sup>8</sup> Though both are emotions, the *sthāyīs* carry more weight. *Sthāyibhāvas*, however, are not mentioned in the *rasa-sūtra* and this has been one of the points of discussion among the commentators. What is the relationship between the *sthāyīs* and the *rasas*? There are eight *sthāyibhāvas*: *rati* (love), *hāsa* (laughter), *śoka* (sadness),

*krodha* (anger), *utsāha* (courage), *bhaya* (fear) *jugupsā* (disgust) and *vismaya* (wonder).<sup>9</sup> These correspond to the eight *rasas*: *śṛṅgāra* (eros), *hāsyā* (comedy), *karuṇā* (compassion), *raudra* (fury), *vīra* (heroism), *bhayānaka* (horror), *bībhatsa* (revulsion) and *adbhuta* (astonishment). To these Abhinavagupta adds the *rasa śānta* (tranquility), which relates to the *sthāyī nirveda* (indifference) produced by knowledge of the Truth.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a correlation exists between the *sthāyīs* and the *rasas*. Yet, because special effort has been made to give the *rasas* different names, it must be concluded that the *rasas* are different from the *sthāyīs*.

Bharata himself says in several places that the *sthāyī* becomes *rasa* when it is brought to experience or is tasted through the various *bhāvas*, i.e., the *vibhāvas*, etc.<sup>11</sup> The example he gives is the production and enjoyment of a flavor when many ingredients, herbs and substances are combined.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the *sthāyīs* are not mentioned in the *rasa-sūtra* as part of the combination which produces or manifests *rasa*.

Abhinavagupta seems to say that it is not the *sthāyī* which becomes *rasa*. He does not seem to distinguish between the *sthāyībhāvas* and ordinary emotions (*bhāvas*). As a result the mere tasting of the *sthāyīs* cannot be a source of pleasure because four of the eight or nine *sthāyīs*, i.e., anger, fear, disgust and sadness are not pleasant experiences. The experiencing of those *sthāyīs* cannot account for the experience of pleasure in art. Thus, Abhinavagupta in an important passage of his commentary on Bharata appears to distinguish *rasa* from the *sthāyī*.<sup>13</sup> In another place, he says that the *sthāyī* which is generalized (*sādhāraṇībhūta*) and brought within the experience of a long-lasting or single consciousness is *rasa*.<sup>14</sup> In either case, the *sthāyī*, taken as an ordinary day-to-day emotional experience, is barred from becoming *rasa*. Considering the different meanings in which Bharata and Abhinavagupta use the word *sthāyībhāva*, perhaps the difference between them is not so great. Abhinavagupta uses it to refer to everyday emotions and thus must sharply distinguish it from *rasa*, which is non-worldly (*alaukika*) and always pleasurable. Bharata limits the use of the word *bhāva* to the world of art and thereby already distinguishes the *sthāyībhāva* from ordinary emotions.<sup>15</sup>

Because of this uncertainty about the relationship of the *sthāyī* to *rasa*, some disagreement has arisen among the commentators as to who experiences *rasa*. Since Bharata distinguishes between the world of everyday life and the world of the theater, *rasa* is the experience of the man of taste or the aesthete (*sahṛdaya*) who views a play or hears a poem. A verse cited in

his text supports this view:

The wise taste with their minds the *sthāyibhāvas* which are formed through the enactment of the *bhāvas* (i.e., the *vibhāvas*, etc.). These are called dramatic *rasas*.<sup>16</sup>

From this statement two ideas may be gathered. One arises from the use of the word *āsvādayanti*, "they taste." This usage implies a mode of experience of emotion quite different from the way we ordinarily experience emotion. It implies a pleasurable experience. The second idea is that the *sthāyī* is of a different order than ordinary emotion because it is formed (*sambaddha*) by acting and not by real incidents. Thus, emotions "formed" in this way are different from ordinary emotions. A distinction is implied in this verse between the world of art and that of life. A confusion, however, is introduced into the conception by the example of the enjoyment of food. Food has only one sphere, that of life. One enjoys food directly, not indirectly, that is, by watching others eat. The implication of this example is that there is no difference between the *rasa* and the *sthāyī*. Therefore, some of the commentators, such as Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, say that *rasa* primarily occurs in the characters of the play, such as Rāma and Sītā, and is only secondarily enjoyed by the audience. For Bharata and certainly for Abhinavagupta, *rasa* is only available through art and to the man of taste. The original subjects of a play were part of the ordinary world and thus experienced *bhāva* and not *rasa*.

This is the aesthetic discussion of *rasa* which forms the background on which Rūpa's theory must be viewed. The discussions and conclusions of Abhinavagupta were later systematized by Mammaṭa Bhaṭṭa (12th century) in his monumental *Kāvya-prakāśa*, which became one of the standard texts of poetics.<sup>17</sup> This text was carried to various parts of India and became the object of numerous commentaries. One other later work should be mentioned, one which gained a high degree of popularity and which gives a full treatment of *rasa*. This is the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* of Viśvanātha (14th century). This text deals with both poetics and drama and was widely used in Eastern India. Its author lived in Orissa. Rūpa Gosvāmin was familiar with this text and once referred to it disparagingly in the beginning of his work on dramaturgy, the *Nāṭaka-candrikā*.<sup>18</sup>

Both the texts, the *Kāvya-prakāśa* and the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, were primarily influenced by Abhinavagupta and the expounder of the *dhvani* (suggestion) theory of poetry, Ānandavardhana, the author of the *Dhvanyāloka*.

The texts formed what might be called a tradition of reflection on *rasa*, and, since Abhinavagupta, Ānandavardhana and Mammaṭa Bhaṭṭa were all Kāśmīris, this tradition may be referred to as the Kāśmīrī or Northern school of aesthetics. Though this tradition was, or rather became, the predominant tradition, it was by no means the only aesthetic school of thought. At least one other tradition existed which may be called the Southern school, since most of its writers were from South India. The main exponent of this Southern tradition was King Bhoja of Dhārā. Since, as we shall see later, the *rasa* concept of Rūpa Gosvāmin differs in significant ways from that of Abhinavagupta and his *rasa* tradition, it is worth taking a brief look at the interesting *rasa* speculations of Bhojarāja.

King Bhoja was an extremely learned and prolific king who lived in Mālvā in the eleventh century. Though he wrote many works, including a commentary on the *Yoga-sūtra* of Patañjali, his writings on aesthetics are contained in two, the *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa* and the *Sarasvatī-kañṭhābharana*. The first is a massive text in prose and verse consisting of thirty-six chapters. The second, which is probably his earlier work, is much shorter and is mostly in verse. The eleventh chapter of the *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa* and the fifth chapter of the *Sarasvatī-kañṭhābharana* contain his discussion of *rasa*. Bhoja's theory of *rasa* is unique in that he disagrees with the rest of the traditions by insisting that there is only one *rasa* and that *rasa* is *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, the erotic sentiment. All other *rasas* issue out of *śṛṅgāra* and ultimately culminate in *śṛṅgāra*. Bhoja argues in his *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa* that *rasa* and *prema* (love) are one and the same. Anyone who loves a particular kind of activity will excel in that activity and experience *rasa* with respect to it.<sup>19</sup> One who, on the other hand, is incapable of loving cannot experience *rasa* in any activity. Thus, love or *prema* is essential for the experience of *rasa*, or, more appropriately, love is *rasa*. This capacity to love is given three names: *śṛṅgāra* (eros), *abhimāna* (pride) and *ahanikāra* (a sense of self). The *bhāvas* (the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, *vyabhicāris* and the *sthāyibhāvas*) are born out of *śṛṅgāra* and are the causes of the development and rise to excellence of *śṛṅgāra*.

Without going into the complexities of Bhoja's *rasa* theory, a few of its salient features should be mentioned. In the first place, Bhoja apparently felt that *rasa* may be experienced by the *nāyaka*, that is, the characters on whose story a play or poem is based. He also felt that the capacity to experience *rasa* was not shared by all but was the result of the presence of an *adṛṣṭa* (the unseen results of past lives), which is uncommon and which is the result of *dharma* or religious piety or practice.<sup>20</sup> Another idea of his

which is of interest is his conception of the three points or stages of *rasa* development. The first stage of *rasa* is its existence as the matured self-consciousness (*ahanākāra*) in the mind of the man of taste. The second stage is the manifestation of all the *bhāvas* out of the *ahanākāra* and the rise of the *ahanākāra* to its greatest excellence through those *bhāvas*. The final stage is the transformation of the *rati sthāyibhāva* into *prema*, which is *rasa*, as a result of its reaching its fullest maturity, and by connection with this transformation of *rati* into *prema* the other *bhāvas* are also transformed into *rasa*.<sup>21</sup> To repeat, *śṛṅgāra* alone exists at first in the form of the developed self-consciousness. Out of this consciousness arise all of the forty-nine *bhāvas*. These *bhāvas* reach their highest excellence as a result of association with *rati* transformed into *prema* and thus themselves transform (*pariṇatī*) into *rasa*. As we shall see later, these ideas of Bhoja's may have had a strong influence on the *rasa* conception of Rūpa Gosvāmin.<sup>22</sup>

It is now time to examine Rūpa Gosvāmin's theory of *rasa*, or rather *bhakti-rasa*, in some detail. Rūpa's statements about *rasa* are scattered throughout his theoretical books. An effort will be made to collect these propositions and put them in a logical order. Let us begin with Rūpa's characterization of *bhakti-rasa* itself. What is *bhakti-rasa*? Rūpa describes *bhakti-rasa* in several places in his works as an astonishment (*camatkāra*) aroused by or accompanied by intense delight (*praudhānanda*).<sup>23</sup> In this characterization, the importance given to astonishment reveals Rūpa's indebtedness to Viśvanātha's formulation of *rasa*. Viśvanātha in his *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* says that *rasa* is "an unbroken, self-manifesting consciousness of delight whose essence is an otherworldly astonishment."<sup>24</sup> Viśvanātha wrote on what Rūpa considered to be mundane *rasa*, however. For Rūpa, only *bhakti-rasa* is supramundane, or spiritual.<sup>25</sup> The *sthāyibhāva* of *bhakti-rasa* is *kṛṣṇa-rati*, love for Kṛṣṇa, which because of its connection with Kṛṣṇa is sacred or supernatural (*alaukika*) from the start. In this, Rūpa has radically differed from all the previous *rasa* traditions. The standard opinion of these traditions is that *rati* or love which is directed at anyone besides a woman cannot become *rasa* but remains only a *bhāva*.<sup>26</sup> Thus, *kṛṣṇa-rati*, according to this opinion, being love for a god, cannot be the foundation for a *rasa*. For them, *bhakti-rasa* is a mistaken notion.

Actually, Rūpa was not the first, nor the last, to speak of *bhakti-rasa*.<sup>27</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* hints at such an idea, though a fully developed idea of *rasa* is not explicitly discussed in the text.<sup>28</sup> An idea of *bhakti-rasa*, however, is developed out of the *Purāṇa* by Vopadeva (13th century) in his work the

*Muktāphala*. Vopadeva says that there are nine types of *bhaktas* because there are nine types of *bhakti-rasa*.<sup>29</sup> These nine types of *bhakti-rasa* correspond to the standard nine *rasas* discussed in the Sanskrit aesthetic traditions (*śānta*, tranquillity, is included). He, however, defines *bhakti-rasa* as "the astonishment produced by the hearing (or reading) of the activities of Viṣṇu or his devotees as described by Vyāsa and others."<sup>30</sup> This definition contains several of the seeds of Rūpa's *bhakti-rasa*. The *vibhāvas* of Rūpa's theory, Viṣṇu and his devotee, are present, as well as the importance of hearing (*śravaṇa*) literary descriptions of the Lord's activities and finally the idea of astonishment (*camatkāra*); these all become parts of Rūpa's later conception of *rasa*.

Rūpa differs considerably from Vopadeva, however, and this is primarily in his concept of the *sthāyibhāva* of *bhakti-rasa*. Since Rūpa places a great deal of importance on the *sthāyibhāva*, i.e., *kṛṣṇa-rati*, it is appropriate to start with a discussion of Rūpa's idea of the *sthāyī*. One could justifiably say that the *sthāyī* is the cornerstone of Rūpa's *rasa* theory. While Vopadeva recognized the traditional nine *sthāyibhāva*, Rūpa recognizes only one of them, *rati* (love). He relegates seven of the others to a secondary position. They only become *bhakti-rasa* when assisted by, or associated with, the primary *sthāyī*, *kṛṣṇa-rati*.<sup>31</sup> *Śānta*, the ninth *rasa*, becomes absorbed into Rūpa's conception of *kṛṣṇa-rati* as a state of transition during which one becomes indifferent to the attractions of the world and experiences a mild but non-specific attraction to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>32</sup> This indifference towards the world is a component of all the other forms of *kṛṣṇa-rati*.

The concept of *rati* (love) in classical aesthetics, therefore, became the primary *sthāyibhāva* for Rūpa. This *rati* exists in two stages of manifestation. The first stage is called *bhāva* and the fully matured stage is called *prema*. Rūpa defines *bhāva* as:

*Bhāva* is a particular form of pure being (*śuddha-sattva*) which is like a beam of the sun of *prema*. Its rays soften the heart (*citta*).<sup>33</sup>

The image here is that of the rising sun. Before the sun itself rises, its first rays appear on the horizon. *Prema* is compared with the sun and its first ray is *bhāva*. The action of the rays or effulgence of that first sunbeam is a softening of the heart. Rūpa supports his statement by citing a verse from an unknown *Tantra* which says that the *bhāva* is the first stage of *prema*. Later, he equates *bhāva* with *rati* on the basis of their

equation in both the *Purāṇas* and the *Nāṭya-śāstra* of Bharata.<sup>34</sup> This idea of *bhāva* as the first stage of the appearance of emotion was an idea already current in the older aesthetic texts. It occurs mostly in the context of the analysis of various *anubhāvas* (those which arise in the heart, *citta*, or mind, *manas*) of women falling in love. Rūpa, in his *Uj्ज्वा-la-nīlamani*, quotes a previous authority (whom he does not name but who appears to be Śārādātanaya, the author of the *Bhāva-prakāśana*) who says,

The motionlessness of the mind when there is cause for its disturbance is called *sattva* or being. The first fluctuation in it, like the first change in a seed (as it starts to sprout), is called *bhāva*.<sup>35</sup>

Rūpa's application of this concept of *bhāva*, which indicates the first appearance of emotion in the mind, to the context of the first manifestation of *kṛṣṇa-rati* seems an apt one.

Rūpa proceeds to develop his doctrine of *bhāva* or *rati* along unusual lines. He draws a sharp line between his *kṛṣṇa-rati* and all other forms of *rati* or *sthāyibhāva*. Rūpa says in two verses,

This *rati*, however, appears among the functions of the mind and becomes one of them. Though it is self-manifesting, it appears as if manifested, and though it actually is gustation itself, it becomes the cause for a gustation whose objects are Kṛṣṇa, etc.<sup>36</sup>

In this unusual characterization of the *sthāyibhāva* called *kṛṣṇa-rati*, Rūpa claims for it a supernatural origin. It does not exist as one of the "natural" emotions or faculties of the mind. It "appears" in the mind and assumes a mental nature, but from its inception it is transcendent or otherworldly (*alaukika*). Furthermore, although it is self-manifesting, it appears as if manifested. By this claim, Rūpa is denying the relationship of cause and effect in manifesting this *rati*, and, certainly, as one of his commentators, Mukunda Dāsa Gosvāmin, points out, poetry or drama is not a cause of its manifestation. Lastly, Rūpa says that it is gustation or relish itself but acts as the cause for the enjoyment of Kṛṣṇa, his *bhaktas*, etc. Here we are presented with two inexplicable contradictions by which Rūpa wishes to establish the inconceivable nature of this *rati*. From another angle, Rūpa, by this characterization, collapses the distinction between *rati*, i.e., the *sthāyibhāva*, and *rasa*. The *sthāyibhāva* is *rasa* in the case of *bhakti-rasa*. The *sthāyibhāva* is *rasa* when it is not being experienced and *rasa* is the *sthāyibhāva* when it is



being experienced. One of the other outcomes of Rūpa's description of *kṛṣṇa-rati* is that the ability to experience *bhakti-rasa* is sharply distinguished from the ability to experience *rasa* in general; the religious experience is distinguished from the aesthetic experience.

This *kṛṣṇa-rati* is the primary *sthāyibhāva*. It is, according to Rūpa, of two varieties: self-promoting (*svārtha*) and other-promoting (*parārtha*).<sup>37</sup> The self-promoting *rati* nourishes itself through other *bhāvas* which are not opposed to it and diminishes *bhāvas* which are opposed. The other-promoting *rati* contracts itself and gives scope to other *bhāvas* whether they are opposed or not.<sup>38</sup> This *rati* which promotes other *bhāvas* is what gives rise to what Rūpa calls the secondary (*gauṇa*) *kṛṣṇa-rati*. When this other-promoting *kṛṣṇa-rati* is joined with one of the seven traditional *sthāyibhāvas* (that is, all those besides *rati*) it contracts itself and accepts or nourishes the other *bhāva*. This combination is then called secondary (*gauṇa*) *kṛṣṇa-rati*.<sup>39</sup> Because these other *bhāvas* are joined with *kṛṣṇa-rati*, though in a contracted state, they are all also called *rati*.<sup>40</sup> Thus they are given the names *hāsa-rati*, *vismaya-rati*, etc. In all of them there is a component of *kṛṣṇa-rati*. This interesting conception probably has its source in Bhoja's *rasa* speculations. According to him, *rati* is a component of *kṛṣṇa-rati*. This interesting conception probably has its source in Bhoja's *rasa* speculations, wherein he says that *rati* is a component in all the *rasas*. The other *bhāvas* are composed of *rati*, which when transformed into *prema*, turns them into *rasa*.<sup>41</sup>

Primary *kṛṣṇa-rati* of the self-promoting variety is the main *sthāyibhāva* of *bhakti-rasa*. It is of five types: pure, affection, friendship, parental love and amorous love. Rūpa says that this *rati* becomes variegated because of the variety of people in which it appears, just as the sun has different reflections in different substances, such as crystal, etc.<sup>42</sup> Rūpa has expanded the concept of *rati* into these five forms. Pure *rati* is the *śama* of the classical aestheticians which according to some is the *sthāyī* for *śānta-rasa*. *Śama* is a freedom from change or alternative in the mind. *Śānti-rati* is love for Kṛṣṇa as the super-self of all beings. Affection is love mixed with respect such as a servant might have for a kind master. Friendship is the love for a friend such as takes place between equals. Parental love is the love of the parents or guardians for a child, and amorous love is the erotic love of members of the opposite sex for each other. This last *rati* is the traditional *rati* which is the *sthāyī* of *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, the erotic sentiment.

All of these distinctions in *bhāva* are also operative in *prema*, which is the fully developed form of *bhāva*. Rūpa says,



When *bhāva* completely softens the heart and becomes distinguished by a high degree of possessiveness, it is called *prema*. *Prema* (with respect to *bhāva*) is much intensified.<sup>43</sup>

*Prema* has a number of different forms or expansions of increased intensity. Rūpa does not discuss these forms in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* because they are quite uncommon among the practitioners of *bhakti*. In his *Ujjvala-nīlamanī*, however, in the context of *madhura-rati*, amorous love, he gives a list of these other forms of *prema* in a hierarchical order:

When *rati* becomes firm it turns into *prema*; then gradually it becomes *sneha*, *māna*, *praṇaya*, *rāga*, *anurāga* and finally *bhāva*.<sup>44</sup>

To illustrate the relationship of all these forms of *prema* to one another Rūpa says,

Just as the seed becomes the sugar-cane plant and that (becomes) juice (*rasa*) and that (becomes) solidified molasses and that brown sugar crystals and that sugar and that powdered sugar and that rock candy, so it is with the six moods which are forms of *prema*, i.e., *sneha*, etc. These, however, the wise generally call (simply) *prema*.<sup>45</sup>

Ideas of condensation, solidification and intensification are conveyed by this example. The highest form of *prema*, called *bhāva*, should not be confused with what has been called *bhāva* previously, i.e., the first appearance of *rati*. This new *bhāva* is the highest manifestation of *prema*. These distinctions might seem merely scholastic but Rūpa succeeds in associating each stage with a specific set of characteristics which represent acute observations on the nature of amorous love. The highest form of *prema* is called *mahābhāva* and is present only in Rādhā. From the practical point of view there is an important distinction between *bhāva* (the first appearance of *rati*) and *prema*, which Rūpa indicates in a couple of places in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.<sup>46</sup> *Rati* as *bhāva* is dependent on the full expression of the *vibhāvas*, etc., in order to become *rasa*. *Prema*, however, becomes *rasa* even after a slight hearing of such expressions. This indicates that *prema* as a more developed form of *bhāva* is independent of the usual process of *rasa* realization. This is the consequence of the doctrine, mentioned earlier, that *rasa* is not caused by literature in the case of *kṛṣṇa-rati*.

*Kṛṣṇa-rati* in its two stages, *bhāva* and *prema*, is the *sthāyibhāva* of

Rūpa's *bhakti-rasa*. How does *bhakti-rasa* arise, however? Rūpa says,

The *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, *sāttvikas* and *vyabhicārīs* bring this *sthāyibhāva*, *kṛṣṇa-rati*, to the state of enjoyment in the hearts of devotees through the processes of hearing, etc., and it then becomes *bhakti-rasa*.<sup>47</sup>

Once again Rūpa identifies *rasa* and the *sthāyibhāva*. *Rasa* is the *sthāyibhāva* when it is being enjoyed. The *sthāyibhāva*, however, did not occur in Bharata's *rasa-sūtra*: *vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicārī-saṁyogād rasa-niṣpattiḥ*. Rūpa differs from Bharata by adding the *sthāyibhāva* into his formula. He also includes in his characterization the locus of the experience of *rasa*, i.e., the heart of the *bhakta* (devotee). In Bharata's *rasa-sūtra* both the role of the *sthāyī* and the locus of the experience were unstated. These elisions sparked commentarial controversies on these issues with different commentators taking different sides. Rūpa takes a stand which apparently aligns him with the interpretation of Abhinavagupta. The location Rūpa specifies, however (the heart of the devotee), is broad enough to include the characters in a play and the audience as well, for Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's main heroine, is a devotee of Kṛṣṇa just as much as the modern devotee sitting in an assembly listening to a reading of poetry about Kṛṣṇa.

Rūpa provides another, more detailed description of the *rasa* process:

*Rati*, though twofold, becomes *rasa* in the *bhaktas* by means of hearing of, comprehension of, or remembrance of Kṛṣṇa, etc., which have become the *vibhāvas*, etc., just as substances like yogurt, etc. through a particular combination with sugar, black pepper and so on becomes the flavor (*rasa*) called *rasāla*.<sup>48</sup>

Here again *rati* becomes *rasa*. However, in this verse Rūpa expands the process by adding remembrance (*smṛti*) to the means by which the *vibhāva*, etc., might be conveyed. This allows *rasa* to be experienced through meditation or in circumstances other than listening to poetry (hearing) or watching plays (comprehension through the acting of the actors). He also gives us a clear idea of what the *vibhāvas*, etc., are for *bhakti-rasa*. Kṛṣṇa and his *bhaktas* are the *vibhāvas*. Their activities resulting from their feelings of love for each other are the *anubhāvas*; their physical symptoms of intense feeling are the *sāttvikas* and other short term emotions which arise in the middle of the main emotion are the *vyabhicārīs*.

Rūpa gives an interesting example of the creation of *rasa* by comparing it

to *rasāla*, a kind of sweet drink. *Kṛṣṇa-rati* corresponds to the yogurt and other substances in the example. The *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, *sāttvikas* and *vya-bhicāns* are the sugar, black pepper and so on. These must be combined according to a particular recipe. This corresponds to the hearing, comprehending and remembering of the *bhakti-rasa* process. The combination of all these ingredients according to the recipe produces a new substance—*rasāla* on the one hand, and *rasa* on the other. Bharata gives a similar example relating to the enjoyment of food.<sup>49</sup> Both examples suggest the direct enjoyment of the *sthāyibhāva* “spiced” by various other ingredients. With Bharata, however, it must be remembered that the *sthāyī* is an illusion created by the play and the acting of the actors. Thus it can be enjoyed. Were the *sthāyī* actually aroused, the effect on the audience would be entirely different. They would experience actual fear, actual sadness, etc., experiences which are not pleasant. For Rūpa, however, the *sthāyī* itself, once it has made its first mysterious appearance in the heart of the devotee, is always present and the enjoyment of that *sthāyī*, which is itself a form of joy, is *bhakti-rasa*. He says,

*Rati* whose nature is joy exists in the heart of the *bhakta* and is brightened by the two cultivations (*saṁskāras*). It is brought to the state of *rasa* by the *vibhāvas*, etc., that is, *Kṛṣṇa*, etc., which have become objects of perception (*anubhāva*) and thus it attains the highest limit of mature joy and astonishment.<sup>50</sup>

In these verses, Rūpa raises the question of *saṁskāras* or, as translated here, cultivations. *Saṁskāras* are impressions left in the mind by previous or current experiences and practices. They tend to guide one's responses to and interpretations of events which occur in the present. Abhinavagupta bases the ability of a cultured connoisseur to experience *rasa* on the existence in his mind of *saṁskāras* created by previous experiences of the *sthāyibhāva*. Rūpa too attributes importance to the *saṁskāras* or *vāsanās*, as they are also called. Rūpa, in fact, says that in addition to the current cultivation one needs a cultivation from a previous life in order to experience *rasa*.<sup>51</sup> The *rati* alone is apparently not enough. Rūpa's nephew, Jīva Gosvāmin, in his commentary on this statement, says that the presence of the previous cultivation strengthens or increases the *rati*.

Rūpa appears to follow Viśvanātha in requiring two *saṁskāras*. Viśvanātha also requires two cultivations, a present one and one surviving from the past. He reasons that if the present cultivation were not required, then

those who know nothing of *rati* at present would nevertheless experience *rasa*. On the other hand, if the past or old cultivation were not necessary then one would never find someone well conversant with *rati* yet incapable of experiencing *rasa*. One sees, however, that all of those who have no experience of *rati* in the present and some of those that do have such present experience do not realize *rasa*.<sup>52</sup> Rūpa may make the same assertion about *bhakti-rasa*. If both cultivations were not necessary, then those who are not *bhaktas* in their present lives would experience *bhakti-rasa* while those who are *bhaktas* in their present lives would, in every case, experience it. Neither of these is consistent with experience, however. Therefore, two *saṁskāras* are needed.

So far we have been talking about how *rati* or *bhāva* (in Rūpa's terminology) becomes *rasa*. As mentioned before, Rūpa contrasts *rati* with *prema*, which is the fully matured and intensified state of *rati*. He says,

But *prema* becomes immediately enjoyable even when it is lead to a minimum state of perception (*vibhāvanā*) by very minimal *vibhāvas*, etc.<sup>53</sup>

Thus *prema* is distinguished from *rati*, apart from the qualities mentioned earlier, by a relative ease in its becoming *rasa* marked by less of a dependence on the full and well-articulated expression of the *vibhāvas*, etc. This independence of *rati* in its fully matured form has important repercussions which shall be discussed later.

Rūpa discusses the roles of each of the ingredients of *rasa* in bringing about the experience of *rasa*. A brief discussion of this subject will help make the process of *rasa* realization less mysterious. He begins with a general statement which establishes the names and gives examples of each:

The causes of *rati*, such as Kṛṣṇa, his *bhakta*, the sound of his flute, etc.; the effects of *rati*, such as smiles, etc.; as well as the eight (*sāttvika-vikāras*), such as stupefaction, etc.; the assistants of *rati*, such as indifference, etc.—all are known as the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, *sāttvikas* and the *vyabhicārīs*, respectively, in the creation of *rasa*.<sup>54</sup>

Here, as in Bharata, the names: *vibhāvas*, etc., are given to the causes, effects and assistants of the *sthāyibhāva*. In Bharata, this renaming is to distinguish them from their counterparts in the real world. Being represented in drama or poetry, the causes, effects and assistants of emotion attain a different kind of reality, a reality based on illusion. For Rūpa, the distinction rests

not on a distinction between the reality of life and the illusion of drama but on the distinction between the absence or presence of *kṛṣṇa-rati*. When *kṛṣṇa-rati* is present Kṛṣṇa and his *bhaktas* become *vibhāvas* and these *vibhāvas* bring about the enjoyment of the *sthāyī*, which is known as *rasa*. After this general characterization, he expands on the roles of each of the ingredients of *rasa*. About the *vibhāvas* he says:

Because they create (*vibhāvayanti*) a suitability in *rati* for the various particular kinds of enjoyment, they are called *vibhāvas* by the wise.<sup>55</sup>

Rūpa emphasizes the role of *vibhāvas* in making the *rati* capable of being tasted and, at the same time, in narrowing *rati* down to a particular one of its facets like servitude (*prīti*), friendship (*preyas*), etc. Thus the *vibhāvas* prepare *rati* for tasting and particularize it. Once *rati* is so prepared, the *anubhāvas* begin their work,

Because they make *rati* known or spread the *rati* (made capable of enjoyment by the *vibhāvas*), abounding in enjoyment, to the mind, they, the sidelong glances and the physical transformations, are called *anubhāvas*.<sup>56</sup>

Previously, Rūpa defined the meaning of the term *vibhāva* as something which particularizes a general thing (*viśeṣena bhāvayati*). Here, he focuses on *anubhāva* as that which causes the cognition of something (*anubhāvayati*). Thus the *anubhāvas* make the presence of the *rati* known.<sup>57</sup> The particularized *rati* brought now to the awareness of the characters and the audience is then completed through the action of the *vyabhicārīs*:

Those (emotions) such as indifference, etc., which set in motion or variegate *rati* developed in such a manner (i.e., particularized and cognized) are called the *sañcārīs* (*vyabhicārīs*).<sup>58</sup>

Rūpa uses the word *sañcārī* (from the root *sañ-car*) to define the role of the *vyabhicārīs*. The meaning of the root is "to go or come together, to meet or join." The *vyabhicārīs* join with the *sthāyī* to give it variety. The *sthāyī* is stationary and long lasting but the *vyabhicārīs* appear briefly, give a special flavor to the *sthāyī*, and then disappear. Rūpa says in another place,

The *vyabhicārīs*, which are cognized through spoken language, gesture

and physical symptoms, set the *bhāva* in motion. Thus they are also called *sañcārīs*. They rise out of and dissolve into the *sthāyī*, which is like an ocean of nectar. Like waves, they increase it and then again become one with it.<sup>59</sup>

The *vyabhicārīs*, therefore, add variety to the *sthāyī* by joining with it and, in some cases, temporarily predominating over it like a wave in the ocean. This temporary domination of the *sthāyī* is suggested by the causative use of the verb *sañ-car*, which means "to cause to go or move." As is often the case in perception, the characteristics of a particular emotion are better appreciated when they are juxtaposed with contrasting emotions. The simile of the ocean and its waves, however, suggests that the distinct emotions are rooted in or are aspects of the dominant *sthāyī*. Emotions, which are fundamentally different from the *sthāyī*, cannot act as *vyabhicārīs* for that *sthāyī* because they weaken it rather than strengthen it.

Though each of these ingredients plays an undeniably important role in *rasa* realization, Rūpa insists on the central importance of the *sthāyī*. At one point in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* he cites the opinion of some opponent who holds that it is the influence of poetry or drama which causes Kṛṣṇa and his *bhaktas*, etc., to become *vibhāvas*, etc., and thus bring about the enjoyment of *rasa*.<sup>60</sup> That is to say, poetry and drama are the causes of the *bhakti-rasa* experience. This is a point of view which a representative of the classical *rasa* theory would hold. Rūpa, however, says no: it is the influence of *kṛṣṇa-rati* itself which is the cause of *rasa*. This *rati* itself is an astonishing treasure of sweetness about which it is difficult to reason.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, though the roles of the *vibhāvas*, etc., are important, their representation in poetry or plays is not the primary cause of *rasa*.

Rūpa demonstrates the power of *rati* itself as the cause of *rasa* realization by citing the case of those who are advanced in the development of *bhakti*, i.e., those who have *prema* rather than *rati*. They, even by slightly hearing about Hari (Kṛṣṇa), experience *rasa*.<sup>62</sup> If *bhakti-rasa* were dependent on the hearing of poetry and viewing of plays such a thing would not be possible, because then the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, *sāttvikas* and *vyabhicārīs* presented in poetry or drama must all be heard together in their entirety for *rasa* to be experienced. A full cognition of only some of them, or an unclear cognition of all of them is not sufficient for the manifestation of *rasa*. This is the position of the classical aesthetic tradition. Rūpa, however, admits the partial causality of poetry and drama, to some degree, in bringing about *rasa*

for those whose *rati* is newly developed, i.e., for those on the level of *bhāva-bhakti*.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the power or influence of *kṛṣṇa-rati* itself is the primary cause of *bhakti-rasa*, not poetry or drama.

Rūpa goes one step further in proclaiming the importance of the *sthāyī*, *kṛṣṇa-rati*. He says that it is the *rati* itself which makes Kṛṣṇa, etc., into *vibhāvas*, etc. In other words, *rati* causes the *vibhāvas*:

*Rati* makes Kṛṣṇa and the rest into *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and so on; and then, through them, when they have become *vibhāvas*, etc., expands itself.<sup>64</sup>

He then gives an interesting example of this:

As the ocean fills the clouds with its own water and then through those very rains becomes filled with water again, (so it is with *rati*).<sup>65</sup>

This example portrays the mutual causality of the *sthāyī* and the *vibhāvas*. The *sthāyī* creates the *vibhāvas* and in turn the *vibhāvas* nourish the *sthāyī* and bring it to the level of *rasa*. This conception invites comparison with the three *koṭis* or points of Bhojarāja. The first point or stage is called *ahaṅkāra-śṛṅgāra*, a highly developed sense of identity in the individual. Out of this state or quality of the self (*ātmā*) arises the *bhāvas*, etc. Here Bhoja includes the *sthāyībhāvas* as well. In this way he differs from Rūpa, who has only the *vibhāvas*, etc., being caused by the *sthāyī*. The *sthāyī*, brought to its highest excellence by union with the *vibhāvas*, etc., passes beyond the state of contemplation (*bhāva*) and is transformed into *rasa*, or, as Bhoja calls it, *prema*.<sup>66</sup> Bhoja too gives an interesting example which compares with that of Rūpa:

The forty-nine *bhāvas* headed by *rati*, etc., arise separately out of *śṛṅgāra*, the source of the various *bhāvas*. Surrounding it (*śṛṅgāra*) they expand it like the rays of light around a fire.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, for Bhoja, the *bhāvas* come out of *rasa* and help to bring *rasa* to its highest excellence, at which point it becomes enjoyed in the heart. Bhoja's *ahaṅkāra-śṛṅgāra* corresponds to Rūpa's *kṛṣṇa-rati*. Out of these come the *bhāvas*. These *bhāvas* bring about the *rasa*-hood of the *ahaṅkāra-śṛṅgāra*, or, in the case of Rūpa's theory, of *kṛṣṇa-rati*.

Rūpa, however, carries the process one step further by adding what might

be called the “*rasa*-spiral.” He says,

*Rati* makes Kṛṣṇa, etc., (i.e., the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, and so on) into abodes of sweetness, etc., and they, in turn, being experienced as such, cause *rati* to enlarge.<sup>68</sup>

In other words, *kṛṣṇa-rati* makes Kṛṣṇa appear charming and, in turn, that charm makes *kṛṣṇa-rati* grow. This increased *rati* increases Kṛṣṇa’s charm which in turn also increases the *rati*. Thus the process goes on increasing without any end. At the lower limit, however, we find an interesting version of the hermeneutic circle, i.e., one does not find Kṛṣṇa attractive without *rati* and yet Kṛṣṇa’s attractiveness is a cause of *rati*.

### Conclusion

In concluding, a few of the important distinctions between the *rasa* of classical Sanskrit aesthetics and Rūpa’s *bhakti-rasa* should be reiterated. The first and most important point is that *bhakti-rasa* arises from a special *rati* which appears in the consciousness of the *bhakta*, the enjoyment of which constitutes the *bhakti-rasa* experience. This effectively distinguishes *bhakti-rasa* from *rasa* by limiting the *bhakti-rasa* experience to *bhaktas* who have this *rati*. On the other hand, the *rasa* of classical aesthetics is not denied. The experience of the non-*bhaktas*, however, is governed by the presence of the *vāsanās*, or impressions, in their minds of the other *sthāyīs*, which are the bases of the classical *rasas*. Therefore, two people, one a *bhakta* and one a non-*bhakta*, hearing the same poem about Kṛṣṇa might both experience *rasa*, but the *rasa* would be different because they are based on different *sthāyīs*. For the *bhakta*, this *sthāyī* called *kṛṣṇa-rati* arises either as the result of a period of devotional practices (*sādhana*) or as the result of the mercy (*kṛpā*) of Kṛṣṇa or his *bhakta*. For the non-*bhakta*, the *sthāyīs* are the result of past emotional experiences which have left impressions (*saṁskāras*) in their minds. The special *sthāyī* called *kṛṣṇa-rati* is the source of the supernatural nature of the *bhakti-rasa* experience. This *sthāyī* is from the very beginning supernatural. Rūpa describes it as *śuddha-sattva-viśeṣātmā* and *mahāśakti-vilāsātmā*, “a particular form of purified being” and “a form of the great power.”<sup>69</sup> Both of these characterizations proclaim *kṛṣṇa-rati*’s transcendent nature in the peculiar language of this Vaiṣṇava school. If the *sthāyī* is supernatural its enjoyment, an event given the name *rasa*, is supernatural as



well. In classical aesthetics, however, the *sthāyī* is not supernatural while *rasa* is considered to be so. This leap into transcendence depends on a number of conditions arising in the context of poetry or drama. The chief of these conditions is the generalization of the *sthāyī* by means of the conflict and final mutual negation of reality and illusion in the participation of the man of taste in poetry or drama.

It follows from this that classical *rasa* is dependent on representation in plays and poetry. The *bhakti-rasa*, however, is not dependent on plays or poetry. In advanced devotees even a slight hearing can bring about the enjoyment of *kṛṣṇa-rati*. *Kṛṣṇa-rati* by its very nature is enjoyable. Poetry may assist in bringing about the event of enjoyment, but this event may occur in other ways too. Rūpa gives three processes: *śruti*, hearing, *avagati*, comprehension, and *smṛti*, remembering. The first two refer to poetry and drama respectively; but the third can take place in the mind unassisted by the senses. In such a case, this refers to the form of visualization practice called *smaraṇa*, which has gained prominence in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Thus the *rasa* experience is extended to the context of meditation. If remembrance is sparked by external objects, then we have the condition Caitanya experienced on his visit to Vṛndāvana and during his last years in Purī. Jīva Gosvāmin mentions other contexts as well in which *rasa* might be experienced, though he does not list them.<sup>70</sup>

A further ramification of the special *alaukika* (transcendent) and enjoyable nature of *bhakti-rasa* is that it can be experienced by the characters (*anukārya*) about whom the plays and poetry are written, i.e., by Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa themselves and their *līlā* associates. The classical *rasa*, in contrast, is not only dependent on expression in poetry but can only be experienced by the members of the audience. The original characters on whose story a poem or a drama is based are limited, providing, of course, that they are not altogether imaginary, to the experience of *bhāva*. Thus Nala and Damayanti could only experience *rati-sthāyibhāva* while those who listen to their story dramatically presented can experience *rasa* from it. *Rasa* which arises only when generalization takes place, e.g., through plays or poetry, cannot be experienced by the subjects of a work of art unless they become members of the audience and participate as such in their own story. Neither can an actor experience *rasa* because he or she, being concentrated on the work of acting, must be fully aware of what he or she is doing. Thus only the audience is in a position to experience *rasa*. Such is the position of classical aesthetics.

Rūpa, as we have seen, denies this in the case of *bhakti-rasa* and extends the *rasa* experience to the subjects of a play. For Rūpa, the *sthāyī* itself is *alaukika* and therefore those who possess the *sthāyī* may also experience *rasa*. This is to say that Rūpa has, in the case of *bhakti-rasa*, practically eliminated the difference between the *sthāyī* and *rasa*.

One more peculiarity of Rūpa's *rasa* theory should be mentioned here. Since *kṛṣṇa-rati* is the essential element of the *bhakti-rasa* experience, Rūpa gives it greater emphasis than the classical aesthetic theorists did the *sthāyibhāvas* in their theory. For Rūpa, the *sthāyī* creates the *vibhāvas* and then is expanded and enriched by them. While the *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhi-cāris* are, according to the classical theory, intimately related to the *sthāyī*, they are not caused by the *sthāyī*. In the real world they are the causes, effects and accompanying emotions of the *sthāyī*. When portrayed in poetry or drama they become *vibhāvas*, etc., and set in motion processes of cognition which awaken dormant impressions in the mind relating to the appropriate *sthāyī*. It has not been argued that it is the *sthāyī* which empowers the *vibhāvas*, etc., to do such awakening, nor that the *sthāyī* is the cause or source of the *vibhāvas*, and so on.

Rūpa says, however, that the *sthāyī* imparts to the appropriate objects their *vibhāva*-hood, etc., and thus brings itself to a state of enjoyment. This is possible because the *sthāyī* itself is present in the minds of the *bhaktas* and not just an impression of the *sthāyī*. The result is that since the *sthāyī* makes the appropriate objects into *vibhāvas*, etc., and the *sthāyī* is carried around in the heart of the *bhakta*, *rasa* can be experienced in any context. A person having direct experience of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlā* as a member of that *līlā* can also experience *rasa*. Here again Rūpa gives us his insight into the religious experience of Śrī Caitanya when in Purī he went running off madly into the ocean, mistaking it for the River Yamunā. His *kṛṣṇa-rati* made the ocean into a *vibhāva*, the river of Kṛṣṇa, and thus the experience of the *rasa* of love-in-separation (*vipralambha*) was awakened in his heart. For him, the whole world became a potential *vibhāva* for *kṛṣṇa-rati*.

Therefore, we have arrived, after a long journey through the convoluted and complex world of theory, face to face with the practical world of religious feeling and experience. A more thorough treatment of this fascinating topic can provide some insight into the world of religious feeling and how religious value becomes superimposed on the world of common experience. Perhaps a method of analysis based on Rūpa's efforts to analyze the religious experience of his great master can help us grasp some of the

dynamics of religious feeling and experience in other religious traditions as well.

### ENDNOTES

1. By "proto-novels" I have in mind compositions such as *campū*s like the *Ānanda-vṛndāvana-campū* by Kavi Karṇapūra and the *Gopāla-campū* by Jīva Gosvāmin. These are prose compositions in Sanskrit with occasional versification which tell a story.

2. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.59.

3. "He indeed is *rasa*. This one obtaining *rasa* becomes joyful."

4. Jagannātha Paṇḍita, *Rasa-gaṅgādhara*, p.58.

5. *Nāṭya-śāstra*, Chapter Six, p. 271.

6. *ibid.*

7. Abhinavagupta, *Abhinava-bhārati*, pp. 282-3; *Kāvya-loka-locana* on the *Dhvanyāloka*, p. 14.

8. *Nāṭya-śāstra*, pp 343-4

9. *ibid.*, 6.17, p. 267.

10. *Abhinava-bhārati*, p. 267.

11. *Nāṭya-śāstra*, pp. 286, 288, 343-4.

12. *ibid.*, p. 285.

13. *Abhinava-bhārati*, p. 282. I say "appears" here because the reading which is *sthāyi-vilakṣaṇa eva rasaḥ* contains a suggested reading, given by the editor, of it *sthāyi-lakṣaṇa eva rasaḥ*. The basis for this amendment is unknown. Since, immediately following this passage, Abhinava contradicts Śrī Śaṅkuka and others who say, *sthāyī eva vibhāva-pratyāyo rasyamānatvād rasa ucyate*, the reading *vilakṣaṇa* (different) seems correct here.

14. *ibid.*, p. 283.

15. *Nāṭya-śāstra*, 7.1-3, p. 340.

16. *ibid.*, 6.32-3, p. 288.

17. Mammāṭa Bhaṭṭa's representation of the views of some of the commentators on Bharata differs, sometimes substantially, from those same views as given by Abhinavagupta. Such is the case of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa's viewpoint, for instance.

18. *Nāṭaka-candrikā*, verse 2, p. 1.

19. *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa*, vol. 2, p. 429.

20. *ibid.*, p. 431.

21. *ibid.*, p. 436 and 444.

22. This primarily occurred through the work of Siṃhabhūpāla, called the *Rasānava-sudhākara*. Siṃhabhūpāla was a mid-fourteenth-century king of Rachakonda in Andhra Pradesh and a member of the *rasa* tradition of Bhojarāja.

23. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.1.10 and 2.5.81. See also; 2.5.104, 110, 123, 132.

24. *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, p. 85.

25. *Ujjaīna-nīlamanī*, 1.21, 5.2; *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.5.107-8.

26. *Kāvya-prakāśa*, 4.35, p. 62.

27. After Rūpa Gosvāmin, the great Advaita Vedāntin Madhusūdana Sarasvatī wrote his *Bhakti-rasāyaṇa*.
28. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 1.1.3.
29. *Muktāphala*, p. 164.
30. *ibid.*, p. 167.
31. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.5.42-44.
32. *ibid.*, 2.5.8-21.
33. *ibid.*, 1.3.1.
34. *ibid.*, 1.3.13.
35. *Uj्jvala-nīlamanī*, 11.7. See *Bhāva-prakāśana*, p. 11, and *Rasāṇḍava-sudhākara*, p. 80.
36. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.3.4-5.
37. *ibid.*, 2.5.2-3.
38. *ibid.*, 2.5.4-5.
39. *ibid.*, 2.5.39.
40. *ibid.*, 2.5.42.
41. *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa*, p. 436.
42. *ibid.*, 2.5.6-7.
43. *ibid.*, 1.4.1.
44. *Uj्jvala-nīlamanī*, 14.60.
45. *ibid.*, 14.55.
46. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.1.11 and 2.5.97.
47. *ibid.*, 2.1.5.
48. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.5.79-80.
49. *Nāṭya-śāstra*, p. 288.
50. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.1.9-10.
51. *ibid.*, 2.1.6.
52. *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, p. 94.
53. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.1.11.
54. *ibid.*, 2.1.12-13.
55. *ibid.*, 2.5.87.
56. *ibid.*, 2.5.88.
57. *ibid.*, 2.2.1, *cittastha-bhāvānām avabodhakāḥ*. "They reveal the emotions situated in the mind."
58. *ibid.*, 2.5.89.
59. *ibid.*, 2.4.2-3.
60. *ibid.*, 2.5.90.
61. *ibid.*, 2.5.91.
62. *ibid.*, 2.5.97.
63. *ibid.*, 2.5.96.
64. *ibid.*, 2.5.94.
65. *ibid.*, 2.5.95.

66. *Śrīṅgāra-prakāśa*, p. 436.
67. *ibid.*
68. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.5.98.
69. *ibid.*, 1.3.1 and 2.5.92.
70. Jiva Gosvāmin, *Durgama-saṅgamaṇi* on *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.5.95.

## THE PARĀ-BHAKTI OF THE GOPĪS IN THE RĀSA-LĪLĀ PAÑCĀDHYĀYĪ

Eric Huberman

**T**he tradition of the cowherd women of Vṛndāvana as the supreme exemplars of bhakti has its roots in the *rāsapañcādhyaī*, the five chapters describing Kṛṣṇa's meeting with, separation from, and reunion with the cowherd women (*gopīs*) in the tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. These chapters have nourished a remarkable variety of poetic and dramatic works that have continued to amplify the theme of the *gopīs'* extraordinary love for Kṛṣṇa in various contexts, and their ongoing reading and recitation continues to provoke profound devotion, scholarly debate, and even bitter scorn.

The *rāsapañcādhyaī* has been subject to a wide variety of interpretive efforts: traditional Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava readings declare the *rāsa-līlā* (story of the *rāsa* dance) to be the ultimate emblem of the sacred; other Vaiṣṇava and non-Vaiṣṇava schools view the story in allegorical or didactic terms; Indian "reformers" like Ram Mohan Roy spurned the *Bhāgavata* as grossly immoral; and contemporary psychoanalytic readings, by Indians and Westerners alike, suggest that the *Bhāgavata* has appropriated the "cowherd woman story" as a collective fantasy, reflecting deeper wishes which are utterly at odds with cultural norms.<sup>1</sup> This last idea is a particularly sensitive one: it raises vociferous objections from representatives of disciplic lines (*sampradāyas*) who advocate deep esoteric interpretations of this material and consider its reduction to human terms to be extremely sacrilegious.<sup>2</sup> My purpose here is neither to catalogue nor evaluate such judgments, which would be quite tenuous to say the least. This article, rather, closely examines the *Bhāgavata's* narrative of the *gopīs'* dance with Kṛṣṇa to see how their love—

their bhakti—develops and to see how its development is depicted and understood. Nevertheless, whenever a particular narrative, practice, or world view appears upon the stage of “world religions,” it behooves us to examine it with a critical eye, and this is what this article seeks to do as well; not, I hope, in any disingenuous spirit, but in a spirit of open inquiry and dialogue. Hence, I will be examining the traditional reading of the *rāsapañcādhyāyī* that discusses the development of bhakti in terms of the transformation of lust into love, and will also consider perspectives on this gleaned from depth psychology and comparative literature.

The first thing I would like to suggest here is that these chapters present high degrees of archetypal material, that is material correspondent to depth levels of the psyche, and this shines through the particulars of the form. No individual character, for example, is described or discussed at any great length—except for Kṛṣṇa, of course (in terms of his other-worldly, divine status). And it is perhaps just this mythic sense, which is non-particular and eclectic, that has encouraged so many variant projections and interpretations of the *rāsa-līlā*. The dance, itself, imaged as Kṛṣṇa dancing in a circle with the cowherd women, singing love songs and surrounded by an audience of celestials, may derive from a specific form noted in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in which female dancers move with their hands interlocked in the company of men who have their arms placed around the necks of the women, or it may reflect an actual South Indian performance tradition (as Friedhelm Hardy suggests).<sup>3</sup> In either case, one sees the operation of elemental images, such as the circle and concentric circles, which function on symbolic levels. Whatever else we may have in this configuration, we have a true *maṇḍala*, a “magic circle” that ropes off boundaries between its interior mystery and the outer world.

This circle, however, does not exist in isolation, but is surrounded by the ornamentation of aesthetic convention. For the word *rāsa* is an expansion (*vrddhi*) of *rasa* (“aesthetic mood”), and suggests that this “ultimate image” in the *Bhāgavata* is an evolute of the aesthetic principle of *rasa* as codified in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.<sup>4</sup> In the dance itself, both Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* are fully ornamented and are accompanied by music from both the cowherd women’s ankle bracelets and from drumming by the heaven dwelling devas. The entire scene, moreover, is elaborately stylized: flowers fall from the sky, the moon flashes through the clouds, and the fragrance of jasmine wafts through the forest. From the very beginning, then, the bhakti of the *gopīs* is presented through classical aesthetic conventions and is thus elevated

above the quotidian.

To return to the issue of sexual transgression (which bothered Ram Mohan Roy as well as so many others) for a moment: the text is only too aware of its controversy and combines the narrative of Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd women with instructive commentary on it (*siddhānta*) from Śuka (the narrator of the tale) to Parikṣit (the principle hearer of the narrative). For this is, after all, the ultimate paradox in the text. Passion, in the *Bhāgavata*, is generally decried as a sickness and a downfall. Here, it seemingly becomes glorified, after having passed through the fires of separation and loss. It is not the so-called moral issue that concerns the text, however, as much as the centrality of the burning passion itself, which is ultimately transformed into the purified emotional energy of bhakti.

The *Bhāgavata*, as mentioned, has repeatedly spoken of passion in a pejorative sense, even equating it with death. But passionate love leading to death has often been exalted in world literary traditions. Indeed, in the Western tragic sensibility this is a logical outcome. De Rougemont, in *Love in the Western World*, speaks of the narrative plot doing all that it can do to prevent passion from attaining its completion—and thus delaying closure, or else projecting a numinous garment around an unattainable union which can only be realized beyond the purview of any worldliness. For in this way, love is exalted beyond life and indicates a transformation out of earthly boundaries. The alliance of *parā-bhakti* or “supreme love” with aesthetics is, then, a natural one. For the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition bases itself upon the refining and transforming of emotion from the *laukika* (worldly) to the *alaukika* (other-worldly) realm through the cultivated contemplation of the *sahṛdaya* or “sensitive-hearted” connoisseur of beauty. A similar sense of other-worldliness can be observed in the devotional tradition’s insistence that *prema-bhakti* is the *pañca-puruṣārtha* or “fifth aim of man,” placing it outside the purview of the general activities of humanity, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and even *mokṣa*.

In the *Bhāgavata*’s narrative, however, passion is spoken of as manifesting in different degrees. In its mundane form, it may be an “all consuming enemy.”<sup>25</sup> At the opening of the *rāsapañcādhyāyī*, it plays the major part in the “purifying ordeal” of the cowherd women, and in its transformed sense of *prema*, or divine love, it is something altogether different from that of our human experience. Personified as *kāma* (the god of desire), passion becomes the fulcrum of transformation, and it is this transformed passion which is said to be the characteristic of bhakti.



Kāma is both an energy and a god. He appears throughout these chapters as both “desire” or “lust” and as Kāmadeva or “Cupid” and is one of the main characters in this drama—although he is only overtly mentioned at crucial points in the narrative. In later commentaries on the *rāsa-līlā*, he is said to be “undefeated,” having triumphed over gods as well as humans. For desire is acknowledged as the driving force in the universe, and often—as in Buddhist traditions—as the enemy of humaneness, morality, and knowledge.

Let us look at the other main players in this drama. The *gopīs* or cowherd women are considered by bhakti practitioners to exhibit the highest evolution of devotional sentiment, and their actions come to be seen as exemplary. While they appear in the form of village women who are married and have children, they are said to pass all of their time in contemplation upon Kṛṣṇa, never forgetting him for even a moment. Their devotional sentiment is said to be their glory and, while appearing to be akin to desire, it will ultimately be seen as something else. Finally there is Kṛṣṇa, the absolute divinity personified as a cowherd boy, who will replace or displace Kāma and become the lover that Vālmiki’s Rāma has refused to be and that Śiva has annihilated.<sup>6</sup>

The energy that binds these characters can almost be thought of as existing on a spectrum running from desire to transfigured love. As in a spectrum it is hard to say where one shade begins and another ends, and yet the *Bhāgavata* will insist that there is a difference between levels of desire, and that this difference is what distinguishes the *gopīs*, not only from other lovers but from other devotees as well. Moreover, as desire moves through the liminal zones of separation and loss, the god of desire, who had previously been labeled as “the great enemy,” is reborn as the god of love—a different rebirth from the one he undergoes after being burned to ashes by Śiva’s glance. Thus, the commentator Śrīdhara speaks of these chapters in terms of “*kandarepa ha*,” the arrogance of kāmadeva killed in *rāsa-maṇḍala*.

I have been obliquely referring to the longstanding traditional reading of these chapters (see Shridhara, Hawley and Shrivatsa Goswami, 1981) that envisions the *Bhāgavata*’s story as a sort of “showdown” between *kāma* and *prema*, or “lust” and “love.” They meet on the battlefield of desire just as Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna meet the sons of Dhṛtāraṣṭra on a battlefield of death. For the two cannot be separated. Death may be said to be standing in the background while *kāma*, which in its frenzy does not see death, as Śuka

repeatedly notes in the *Bhāgavata*, takes the foreground. In these chapters, however, the female (*virahinī*) is separated and suffering while the male, Kṛṣṇa, is the alluring one, a somewhat unusual position in that the male God is alluring the female instead of the delusive female potency alluring the male—as we see in many epic and puranic narratives. The more common epic motif is that of an asexual man succumbing to an alluring woman, as when Indra's *apsarās* seek to break the meditation of ascetic *yogīs*. Even this position, however, becomes somewhat reversed by the end of a story which is characterized by reversals.

### The Structure and the Scene

Remember, this narrative is told to King Parīkṣit, who is cursed to die, along with an audience of *ṛṣīs* and sages. The text has reminded its readers that the narrator, Śuka, has absolutely no experience with *kāma*.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Parīkṣit, as the principal hearer and a king, is the exemplary man of the world. He must demonstrate, therefore, that he is *adhikārī*—qualified to hear the *kṛṣṇacarita*—the most intimate and sacred stories about Kṛṣṇa, and this again implies that the love of the *gopīs* is thought of in other-worldly terms.

When the king first questions the sage, therefore, Śuka does not reply. Parīkṣit then cites his lineage as proof of his capacity to hear. This apparently is still not enough for Śuka, so Parīkṣit reminds those present that he literally shared the same womb as Kṛṣṇa when the latter saved him from Aśvatthāmā's burning weapon. Parīkṣit praises the narrator, and states that he is a faithful devotee, but the qualification that finally provokes Śuka to speak is the king's ardent desire to hear *hari-kathā*.

Though I have given up even drinking water in this  
fast, this unbearable hunger does not torment me as  
I drink the nectar of Hari's stories flowing from the  
moon-lotus of your mouth.

—(BHP X.I.13)

Śuka responds by praising the "proper direction" of Parīkṣit's mind and begins by declaring that such inquiry into Vāsudeva-kathā purifies all; the reciter, the hearer, and the audience.<sup>8</sup> It may be kept in mind, then, that the text frames its image of bhakti around the substance of *hari-kathā*, the narrative itself as the most potent means of purification, with a fervent

desire to hear it as the necessary prerequisite.<sup>9</sup> Thus, we are already in the realm of practice, of *sādhana*. This is not just a “love story,” this is a structured story within a story that is meant to have a specific effect.

### The First Meeting

The first chapter of the *rāsaṣaṇḍādhyaī* begins with a reminder, *bhāgavan-api*, “even though he is Bhagavān,” pointing to the incongruity of the Supreme Being reveling and dancing with women in a circle. The opening verse reads as follows.

*bhagavān api tā rātrīḥ śāradotphulla-malikāḥ  
vikṣya rantum manas-cakre yoga-māyām upāśritāḥ*

Even though he is Bhagavān, seeing those autumn nights blossoming with jasmine, he turned his mind toward love-play and resorted to his magical potency of *yoga-māyā*.

—(BHP X.29.1)<sup>10</sup>

The fact that *tā rātrīḥ* (“those nights”) is in the plural when the text only speaks of one specific night has inspired numerous commentaries: some discussing the *rāsa* dance in terms of something that took place frequently, and others speaking of many nights passing during that one night. The qualifying “*tāḥ*” is often said to indicate “those” nights that resulted from the promise of the *vastrāharaṇa* episode of the Purāṇa, in which Kṛṣṇa steals the clothes of the cowherd women (who had prayed to the goddess Kātyāyanī that Kṛṣṇa would become their husband) and demands that they come out from the river and approach him if they wish their garments returned. By seeing the *gopīs* without clothes, commentators remind us, he automatically becomes their husband and the *gopīs*’ prayers are answered.<sup>11</sup> A large number of the commentaries on these verses seek to justify the apparent moral transgression of Kṛṣṇa’s encounter with married women. Whatever the moral case may be, from the very first verse one is warned that conventional time and space may not apply here as the plural, *rātrīḥ*, casts doubt on a mimetic or historical night. This will be corroborated by the rest of the verse. For the play of the night has a dreamlike quality, a divine dream perhaps, but one in which meeting takes place, not only outside of conventional moral bounds as is often discussed, but also and more

importantly, outside of many other contexts of waking reality.

One may also notice the ingredients for “*rasa*” as an “aesthetic mood” that are included in this first verse: *śaradotpallamallikāḥ*, the autumn night(s) and blooming fragrant flowers, are stimuli (*vibhāvas*) leading to *rasa* according to Bharata’s dictum on the subject.<sup>12</sup> So, even though he is Bhagavān, one may read here, he is apparently affected by the ingredients that inspire *rasa*. The following verse, however, will reverse this and show him as the one who effects the ingredients themselves. The blooming, fragrant flowers, inciters of the aesthetic mood, can also be construed with *tāḥ* in the accusative plural, as some commentators have done, and thus as *gopīs* who bloom like flowers under the play of the moon in this and following verses.

In the earlier *Bhāgavata* narrative, Kṛṣṇa is born on a moonless night in prison and under the threat of execution. Here, the moon infuses the eastern sky with its soothing rays, “like a lover caressing the face of his beloved with cooling saffron after a long absence.”<sup>13</sup> The moon has now emerged and shines beyond the prison house of the conventional day world. And the sight of the moon inspires Kṛṣṇa to enchant the minds of the “fair-eyed” *gopīs*.

The *rāsa-līlā*, then, is presented as being at once in and out of nature, suggesting the transformative power of the aesthetic principle allied to the devotional one. And this will set a precedent of sorts for the practice of bhakti itself: for the traditional nine processes of *bhakti sādhana* as set forth in the seventh *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata*—*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ-smaraṇam pāda-sevanam arcanam vandanam dāsyam sakhyam ātma-nivedanam* (“hearing, chanting, remembering Viṣṇu, serving his feet, worshiping, bowing, serving, befriending, and self-surrender”) involve a good deal of stylized activity as well as devotion, as they engage the senses and the natural functions for a supernatural purpose.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, one of the principal modes of discourse in the *Bhāgavata* is aesthetic and its central modality is play. Thus, Bhagavān makes up his mind (*manas-cakre*) to play, *rantum* (again from *ram*—to frolic, play, or sexually romp), which is similar to *api* in its arresting nature. The “turning of the mind,” *manas cakre*, invokes the heart as well. Commentators have discussed the particular grammatical ending here (*ātmanepada*) in terms of the results of all *rasa*-s being held in Kṛṣṇa since the *ātmanepada* is used when the subject of a verb intends to appropriate the fruit of action.

The pivotal construct here, however, is the compound *yoga-māyā*, conceived of by Vaiṣṇava commentators as being the internal potency of the

divine, as opposed to the *māyā* of the illusory world. The word “*yoga-māyā*” appears previously in the *Gītā* in the context of divine opulence, as a synonym for the covering potency of delusion which veils the vision of the unworthy. In the *Bhāgavata* the word *yoga* takes on meanings according to context, but usually refers to the divine powers of Bhagavān as opposed to his more visible powers of creation.<sup>15</sup> In these verses they suggest a magical context of reversibility. The conventional world of the day, the world of *māyā*, is about to be turned upside down. Therefore, the most unusual of divine opulences will be displayed, and to do so, *yoga-māyā* as a potency is resorted to. This term legitimizes the sense of dramatic narrative action being more than part of the illusory play of the impermanent world.<sup>16</sup> The rather oxymoronic juxtaposition of these words helps explain the interpretive energy that has grown up around them: for *yoga* and *māyā* are usually thought of as being in different camps. The *yogī*, after all, is trying to get out of *māyā*. *Yoga-māyā*, thus, becomes a theological term for the energy under which the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa are conducted, as opposed to the *māyā* or illusion of the external world. For *yoga-māyā* is a potency, just as *citta* or mind is a potency, only of a different nature. Instead of the effacing of mental fluctuations found in the *Yoga-sūtras* (*citta vṛtti nirodhaḥ*), the *Bhāgavata* upholds the radical otherness of the divine potency. Later Gauḍīya texts, such as the Sanātana Gosvāmī’s *Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛta* will emphasize the delusive power of *yoga-māyā* as its ability to conceal the supramundane reality of the Kṛṣṇa-*līlā*. Thus, the apparent dalliance of Kṛṣṇa with cowherd women in the forest is anything but what it may seem to be to the untrained eye.<sup>17</sup> We are dealing with an explicit usage here as the *Bhāgavata* emphasizes that its upcoming narrative is conducted under a particular power, a power related to magic, to the dream, and to “divine illusion” as well, and this lends itself to poetic device.<sup>18</sup>

Why the poetic-aesthetic conventions themselves? The text is certainly dialoging with the terminology and categories of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. For the *Bhāgavata* presents itself as the heir to both the epic and aesthetic traditions and needs to situate itself in relationship to both of them.<sup>19</sup> On another level, however, these verses emphasize a ludic dimension: the ultimate story is a game as much as it is a ritual celebration. Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd women will dance upon the burning ground of experience, upon birth and death, and thus dissolve clinging to reward and similar motivations.

Kṛṣṇa, as S. Bhattacharya has diagrammed, becomes the *ālambana*, “that upon which a *rasa*, or sentiment, hangs.” The *uddīpana*, or exciting condi-

tions, are the moon, the fragrance, and the flowers. The *anubhāvas*, or expressive conditions, will be the gestures of the *gopis*, and the *sañcāribhāvas*, or accompanying feelings, their sorrows.<sup>20</sup> Kṛṣṇa, as the *ālambana*, is the source of *rasa* itself because He is central. Just as Kṛṣṇa rewrites the moral code, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* rewrites the rules of Sanskrit aesthetics.

The next verse, as mentioned, begins the many plays on the moon in the chapter. The rising moon is compared to the long awaited sight of a beloved one, setting up the theme of separation and return and insinuating that, on its deepest levels, *darśana* or “meeting” manifests through absence—perhaps foreshadowing the contention that *vipralambha-syngāra* or “love in separation” is the most powerful form of *prema-bhakti*.<sup>21</sup>

As the women of Vraja are attracted by Kṛṣṇa’s song, various modes of meeting and separation occur. Many schematic diagrams have been offered by commentators which categorize and even rank the various cowherd women in terms of their level of bhakti, usually conceived of in terms of degrees of self abandon. What seems crucial, however, is the fact that minds of the women of Vraja are said to be “seized” by the song which arouses their *kāma*. For Kṛṣṇa’s song, usually thought of by commentators as the song of his flute, is positively Dionysian in its effect.<sup>22</sup> All worldly activities are immediately suspended, as the cowherd women, impelled by the song of Kṛṣṇa, leave despite the objection of husbands and relatives.

Some who were serving food left without serving; some nursing their babies set them aside and ran; others who were waiting upon their husbands suddenly stopped and left; while others who were taking their meals set aside their food and departed. Some were putting on make-up, others were cleansing themselves, others were applying collyrium to their eyes, and others were hurriedly putting on clothes and ornaments in a confused manner—all hastened to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

—(BHP X.29. 6,7)

Interestingly enough, the text uses the adjective *mohitāḥ* here to describe their condition: *govindāpahṛtātmāno na nyavartanta mohitāḥ* (X.29.8), “Enchanted, their very selves stolen away by Govinda, they did not turn back.” From the very beginning, then, these chapters exploit the idea of reversal, for *moha* is usually a pejorative term. *Kāma* is present and *moha* is present, the same *kāma-mohita* that stupefied the *asuras* by the milky ocean. For in the *Purāṇa*’s version of the churning of the milky ocean legend, Viṣṇu assumes the form of Mohinī, literally “the bewildering woman,” to confuse

the enemies of the gods. Mohinī, who is ornamentation personified, succeeds in instantly awakening desire (*kāma*) in the minds of the demonic (*asura*) Daitya generals and enchants their minds while admonishing them.<sup>23</sup>

How is it that the descendants of Kaśyapa Muni are attached to a wanton woman like me? For the wise never place their trust in a lovely woman.

—(BHP VIII.9.9)<sup>24</sup>

The *Bhāgavata* has repeatedly associated woman and sexuality with illusion. Woman is the dangerous embodiment of the powers which bewilder (*moha*) the masculine, ascending spirit/intellect, and attachment to her leads to delusion and death. In the seventh *skandha*, in his discourse on the *varṇāśrama dharma* for example, Nārada echoing Manu, states that woman is like fire and man is like a pot of ghee, and that in a secluded place one should even avoid one's own daughter.

In the *rāsapañcādhyāyī*, however, these paradigms are reversed, and there will be exaltation instead of downfall. Beginning with “*yoga-māyā*,” there is an intimation that the day world of social roles and assigned duties will be left behind as the narrative moves into the world of enchantment, of beauty, and of *rasa*—not as an element of material seduction and bewilderment, but as the most concentrated experience of divine enjoyment (*rasa-svāda*) itself.

At this point Śuka explains that some of the cowherd women cannot manage to leave their homes or are prevented from leaving by their relatives. Locked into their inner apartments, merged in their sentiments on Kṛṣṇa—*kṛṣṇam tad-bhāvanā-yuktāḥ*—they cast off their mortal bodies and die. Śuka explains their death as follows:

Their inauspiciousness washed clean by the fire-like intense agony of unbearable separation from their dearest Lord and their auspiciousness exhausted by the joy of his embrace in their meditation upon him, they instantly dissolved all karmic bonds of mundane existence. They thus cast off their material bodes of the three qualities.<sup>25</sup>

—(BHP X.29.10-11)

The agony of separation here causes the removal of both good and evil karmic reactions, such is its power. These *gopīs* who “never make it to the

dance” are actually looked upon by some commentators as the best of all the cowherd women, since the power of their love elevates them beyond physical proximity. Again, the *Bhāgavata* emphasizes that the power of this situation is due to the intensity of the *gopī*’s passionate attachment and to the fact that their passion is connected to Bhagavān; *taṁ eva paramātmānaṁ jāra-buddhyāpi saṅgatāḥ*, “although the supreme soul, they thought of him as their paramour.”<sup>26</sup>

Śuka continually emphasizes the fundamental incongruity of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme godhead incarnate, in the role of a human lover. And there are many ways that one could understand this. Is God the true lover behind the facade of everyone? Is the whole scenario a blown-up compensatory fantasy substituting for the inevitable loss and unfulfillment that is the lot of love in the mundane world? “Happy love,” De Rougemont ruefully remarks, “has no history.”<sup>27</sup> But here, the deep anguish of loss is so intensified that it removes obstacles instead of creating them. In this image, which has struck the commentarial as well as religious imagination, even death is a welcome by-product of intense longing. For the *gopīs*’ devotion is stronger than life, and their death is glorious: they have attained union with the absolute, even while thinking of him as their lover.

Of course, their lover is said to be the absolute, but what if absolute love turns its object—no matter who—into the beloved? This is the *sahajīyā*’s vision that sees Kṛṣṇa incarnate in every man and the *gopī* Rādhā in every woman. Notice how, either way, all else pales before the power of desire here, the transfigured desire that moves toward the center of desire.

Śuka goes on to explain that any emotion directed toward the Supreme leads to eternal union with Him, and this is the *Bhāgavata*’s vision of *parā-bhakti*: any emotion directed toward Kṛṣṇa is potentially liberating, but the most intense love for Kṛṣṇa dissolves all need for self-preservation and leads to a new level of experience. Now, previously, the *Bhāgavata* has stated that intense attachment knocks the self off its center and leads toward regions of darkness. Is the attachment that the *asuras* felt for Mohinī fundamentally different than that felt by the *gopīs* for Kṛṣṇa, or are they evolutes of one another? The rest of the *rāsa-līlā* moves to construct an answer.

### The First Meeting—Love as a Battle

The first meeting between Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd women is said to still be within the arena of *kāma*. The conversation in which Kṛṣṇa tells the *gopīs* to



return home and in which the *gopīs* respond is filled with innuendo and partakes of games between lovers.<sup>28</sup> Aside from the debated moral issue of the women leaving their homes and husbands to meet Kṛṣṇa in the night, an essential question of presence and absence is addressed in these passages. The issue concerned has to do with the locus of love, is it found in physical proximity or somewhere else?

After a sermon on the contemptability of adulterous affairs, Kṛṣṇa adds the following argument.

Deep feeling (*bhāva*) for me comes from hearing, *darśana*, meditation, and glorification, not by physical proximity. So please return home.<sup>29</sup>

The *darśana* or "vision" of the deity is, here, opposed to physical proximity. This is an underpinning of the idea that the strongest experience of the absolute can occur through separation, and it turns the tables on normative thinking about love and loss. The meeting is a fulfillment of desire for the cowherd women. They have practiced austerity and worshipped for this moment, and yet, the implication here is that the moment of fulfillment will not yield *āśraya*—ultimate rest or sought for resolution. This is the final argument of Kṛṣṇa's, and its finality supersedes his previous moral sermon.

The cowherd women stammer and cry at the rejection. There is to be no meeting. But they are persistent and rebut each of Kṛṣṇa's verses with their own teasing and innuendo. In these verses a correlation is made between absence and the practice of *yoga* as "yoking." The cowherd women threaten to "yoke their bodies to the fire born of separation" and by meditation go to "the abode of Kṛṣṇa's feet."<sup>30</sup> This is basically what their counterparts who could not leave their rooms have done, and it insinuates that "death by *bhakti*" is preferable to life. For suicide by *dhyāna* will lead to the intimate connection with the feet of Kṛṣṇa that can be found in none of the conventional *puruṣārthas* ("aims of man").

The death and dying spoken of here is, of course, much more than a physical event. It is not that the cowherd women are willing their death, as it is their spontaneous reaction brought on by their deep *bhāva* or "feeling mood." In this heightened condition there is no possibility of compromise. The conventional world of daylight and language is, itself, the compromise. The cowherd women are portrayed as having given up everything that belongs to that world, and this seems to be the *Bhāgavata*'s measure of true devotion. The *gopīs* have no other recourse. Their only expressed desire is

to become a *dāsī*, a maidservant or slave of Bhagavān, again a position in which there is no compromise. The all-consuming, energy of *bhāva* invites obliteration. Indeed, the instinct for self preservation is criticized by bhakti ideologues as still being present in the desire for liberation, which is why the maidservant position is thought to be superior to that of the accomplished *yogī*.

Śuka interjects epithets reminding us of Kṛṣṇa's position during this encounter. He is called *puṇḍrabhūṣaṇa*, "jewel or ornament among men" and *yogeśvareśvaraḥ*, "master of masters of yoga." Upon hearing the plea of the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa smiles and laughingly agrees to satisfy them although he, himself, is *ātmārāma*—self satisfied. Kṛṣṇa again is compared to the moon, "surrounded by the *gopī*-stars" and brazenly sports with the cowherd women. The passages here are still very much in *kāma*'s province as they speak of Kṛṣṇa's love-sporting with the cowherd women in detail and discuss his ability to arouse *kāma* in the women of Vraja.<sup>31</sup> In his commentary on these verses, Vallabha goes as far as to correlate the descriptions here with specific passages in the *Kāma-sūtra*.<sup>32</sup> The frolic is short-lived, however. For as soon as Kṛṣṇa observes pride in the cowherd women, he disappears, engendering the great separation.

*tāsāṃ tat-saubhaga-madaṃ vikṣya mānaṃ ca keśavaḥ  
praśamāya prasādāya tatraivāntardhīyata*

Seeing the *gopīs* proud and intoxicated by their fortune, the luxuriant haired Lord, in order to curb their pride and to give them grace, disappeared right there within their midst.

—(BHP X.29.48)

Kṛṣṇa's disappearance has an apparent twofold purpose. First, the curbing of the *gopīs*' pride, a scenario that is found in other episodes of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as in the "*trivikrama*" episode, in which Viṣṇu, in the form of a *brāhmaṇa* boy, is offered three steps by King Bali and steps throughout the three worlds in two and finally places the third step on Bali's head, which the king offers in abject humility. The gift of grace through absence has also been part of the narrative pattern, as in the story of Nārada's meditation on Viṣṇu, where Viṣṇu appears before Nārada and then vanishes—never to be seen again in Nārada's lifetime (ostensibly to increase the measure of Nārada's devotion).<sup>33</sup> Here, Śuka connects the two, punctuated by

the alliterative connection of the two words, *praśamāya* (to cease, terminate, or extinguish as well as to cure or heal) and *praśādāya* (to bestow favor), which reinforce positive connotations of the disappearance of Kṛṣṇa from the *gopīs*' midst. It is this disappearance that has attracted most commentarial attention, and for a good reason. Out of all the words that could have been used, for "disappear" *antar-dhā* alone carries corollary suggestions of "merging into" or more literally, to "place within." Dr. Acyut Lal Bhatt, while reading this verse with me in Vṛndāvana, pointed out this verb to me and asked, "Where could he (Kṛṣṇa) have possibly disappeared to?" The text answers, *tatraiva* "right there." He did not go anywhere. Thus, the ensuing separation is not seen in a context of literal proximity, but rather as a necessary and pivotal part of the *līlā*, and Śuka has indicated just how pivotal it is. The existent idea in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*; *na vinā vipralambhena sambhogah puṣṭim aśnute*—meeting without separation can never achieve fullness—is turned up an octave. For the experience of loss becomes the transforming agent, the fire that purifies and intensifies love to its highest, most absolute degree of self surrender.<sup>34</sup>

### The Great Separation

The disappearance is sudden, and it overwhelms the cowherd women who begin to exhibit various symptoms and degrees of *viraha*, the first being the imitation of his activities (*tās tā vicesṭā jagrhuḥ*) while being fully absorbed (*tad-ātmikāḥ*). Viśvanātha Cakravartī in his commentary on these verses gives the analogy of a man who has just seen a lion in the forest. He is so overwhelmed that he cannot speak and can only imitate with gesture. Speech breaks down. Conventional means are inappropriate to this situation in which the *cittāḥ*, the "heart-mind" of the cowherd women, is *ākṣipta*, "overwhelmed," and literally, "cast down." While the bhakti tradition has often found means of expression through poetry and drama, there is a strong sense here of the inadequacy of speech to describe the overwhelming nature of the *gopīs*' experience. This point will be repeated in the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* where the *prema-svarūpa* or "form of divine love" is said to be *anirvacanīyam* or indescribable by words.<sup>35</sup> Remember, the separation here is sudden and unexpected a sort of "vanishing act" (*antardhīyata*), and there can be no adequate response to it.

The progressions then continues. From being "absorbed" in him, the *gopīs* completely identify with him and declare, *asāvaham*, "It is I" who am

Kṛṣṇa.<sup>36</sup> This may be seen as the peak of madness or as a denial reaction to the undesirable. The actual verse reads as follows.

Identifying with him, the dear ones imitated the movements, smiles, glances, words, etc. of their beloved, becoming his very embodiment. Confounded by the play of Kṛṣṇa, they declared, "I am he."

—(BHP X.30.3)<sup>37</sup>

The progression here is from reflection to absorption of one another, all in absence. Still, this identification is not satisfying, perhaps making a statement about the generalized aesthetic quest of art seeking to capture life or of aspirants seeking states of absorption. In any case, the cowherd women must continue to seek.

The search now takes on the conventionalized hallucinatory rhetoric of *viraha* in which the natural landscape becomes personified. The *gopīs* become *unmattaka*, madwomen, and search through the forest asking various trees, flowers, and animals if they have seen Kṛṣṇa. On one hand, such behavior is symptomatic of madness, but it is also symptomatic of an animated inner-world where subject and object begin to coalesce. The *Bhāgavata* is aware of this, but is also aware of the illusory nature of both states as it mentions the paradox of the cowherd women seeking for that which is everywhere.<sup>38</sup> Finally, agitated and perplexed from searching, the madwomen again act out the various *līlās* of Bhagavān. Once again this activity is described by the words *tad-ātmikāḥ*, fully absorbed in him, but commentators point out that in these verses they imitate as opposed to identify and are thus on a lower level.

The *gopīs* imitate the *līlās* through memory, and their expression of love in separation includes a summary of all the *līlās* (hardly translatable by the word "game," or "pastime") creating a paradigm for the later practice of Rāgānugā-bhakti, in which the devotee consciously follows the comportment and activities of a particular *gopī*.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, they come upon Kṛṣṇa's footprints in the forest and see them mixed with those of another women.<sup>40</sup> This marks the end of the "hallucinatory mode" and the return to external perception.

Now, the external search begins, mixed with further fantasy ignited by the sight of two sets of footprints instead of one. The jealousy expressed here can be seen as being corollary to the experience of loss. The entire dynamic of jealousy presupposes an absence versus a presence. One is separated from one's desire. The attainment of that desire by another reminds

one of this and highlights one's unfulfillment, leading to feeling, fantasy, or activity spurred on by the grating of unfulfilled desire. This situation has been built into many of the "love and loss" narratives in the Purāṇa, and perhaps this is to be expected, as expected as the love triangle of the "family romance," as expected as the difference between what we want and what we have—leading Nietzsche to declare humans to be "the sick animal." Ultimately, however, *parā-bhakti* will be said to be free from any tinge of mundane jealousy or envy, and this will be crucial. For the elevated attachment to Kṛṣṇa is said, by the text, to proceed from the position of *ātma-rāma* or "self-satisfaction."

At this point, Śuka interjects with a verse that has caused some scholarly reactions.

*reme tayā cātma-rata ātmārāmo'py akhaṇḍitaḥ  
kāmināṃ darśayan dainyaṃ striṇāṃ caiva durātmatām*

He, who takes pleasure in his Self, took pleasure with her although he is ever satisfied and whole. Thus showing the miserable state of lustful men and the baseness of women.

—(BHP X.30.34)

This verse mirrors the opening of the scene, *bhagavān-api*, for even though he is satisfied, he takes pleasure in another. But the pleasure of Bhagavān is declared to be different than that of ordinary men and women. Śuka contends that the activity here is not coming from any sense of wanting, and thus, the *Bhāgavata* insists that its own form of erotica is beyond personal desire, confirming the upcoming defeat of *kāma*.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, it can be argued that we are witnessing a model of bhakti as a most outrageous form of sublimation: "Abandon your own sexuality which is base and miserable and let God do it." This vision resonates with Charlotte Vaudeville's observation that the earliest prototype of the bhakta is the epic wife, who is championed for sublimating her desire and her will in the service of her husband.<sup>42</sup> The *gopīs*, as exemplars of bhakti, are also wives, but they have gone to the furthest extreme of abandonment and to the brink of madness.

Even at the "brink of madness," however, one is aware of the ludic nature of the narrative. As dramatic and potentially tragic as it gets, it always exudes the nature of a game of sorts. The reader, particularly the Western reader, may therefore feel a lack of genuine feeling, or one may see feeling

as sublimated into form. The songs of the *gopīs*, as we shall see, are highly stylized, as is the entire narrative. Moreover, until the very end of the tale, Kṛṣṇa never seems to be truly affected by any of the cowherd women. He is fulfilling their desire, or his desire perhaps. But one does not sense that much is really at stake, at least from Kṛṣṇa's side. On the other hand, the fact that this is a "*līlā*" as opposed to a "drama" is never lost upon commentators and practitioners. It might be claimed, in fact, that the apparent lightness of such heavy material is also an aspect of the *yoga-māyā* potency, to delude those who are not willing to enter the esoteric precincts of the narrative. In any case, the cowherd women are said to be the ones who do enter into the full depth of the *līlā*, so let us follow their story.

The *gopīs* continue to envision Kṛṣṇa and his consort. In the vision, it is the consort who believes she has control and is "the best of all women." The dialogue becomes suggestive here as she declares that she can no longer move and that he should "take here wherever his mind goes," which can be read literally as "wherever you wish" or on even more suggestive levels. Kṛṣṇa invites the woman, the embodiment of *kāma*, to climb on his shoulders, and just when she thinks he has yielded, he disappears. This sequence is often read as the final defeat of *kāma*, for once Kṛṣṇa is gone the desiring mood suddenly changes as the woman falls into "burning remorse." The favorite woman, (described as *ārādhita*, a word that some will read as a code name for the goddess Rādhā) alone in the forest with the object of her desire is unable to possess him. Desire has played out its hand, adorning the most intimate of cowherd women and placing her "on top" (riding on his shoulder). Within this playful energy of *līlā*, the deep frustration of human desire is explored. The urgings of desire bring one to a point of satisfaction that quickly transforms into suffering. It is what happens, next, however, that opens new and different visions on this area.

At this point, the cowherd women catch up to the lone consort, and their mood changes from jealousy and fantasy projection to collective lamentation. *Kāma* generally demands privacy, but here separateness and rivalry are abandoned. This is the basis upon which one claim to *bhakti* being free from jealousy is made. And we do note, that throughout the *Bhāgavata*, and especially in these chapters, *bhakti* is usually a congregational as opposed to a single, solitary process.

The *gopīs* all follow the moon, but cannot penetrate the darkness of the forest and return to the river bank together meditating on and singing about their beloved.

Their mind filled with him, speaking of him, acting out about him, absorbed in him, they sang about his qualities, having forgotten their own homes.<sup>43</sup>

The exact sequence delineated here is, *tat-manaskāḥ*—mind; *tat-ālāpah*—speech; *tat-viceṣṭāḥ*—action; and finally *tat-ātmikāḥ*—absorption. In deep *viraha*, in deep loss, there is a complete dying to the conventional self-absorbed posture, expressed in this verse through progressions of focus on Kṛṣṇa coupled with *nātmāgārāṇī sasmaruḥ*—the forgetting of their own homes. And thus, purified love evolves through loss, with the forgetting of the home being metonymous for the release from self-motivated attachment. The lamentation thus takes on an exalted status as the singing cowherd women have given up their own search. Instead, they wait for Kṛṣṇa's arrival, and in this waiting we see the energy of *kāma* moving into *prema*.

### Songs of the Cowherd Women

The “*gopī-gītā*,” the songs of the *gopīs* that follow, are the most celebrated and repeated passages of the *rāsapañcādhyāyī* and also the most aesthetically self-conscious. The first and seventh syllables of these verses, all in eleven syllable to a quarter *triṣṭubh* meter (save for the last), begin with the same consonants as do the second syllables of each *pada* or line with four making up a verse.<sup>44</sup> Thus the cowherd women explain that “for your sake we maintain our life.” The *gopīs* do not die of anguish, but survive by listening to *hari-kathā*. The subject matter of the songs spans the entire spectrum of feeling and is not uniquely centered around the *gopīs*’ “sensual experience” of Kṛṣṇa as some contend.<sup>45</sup>

While previously the cowherd women have asked Kṛṣṇa to place his hands on their burning breasts, they now demand that his lotus feet be placed on their breasts in order to sever *kāma* from their hearts.<sup>46</sup> *Kāma* is given the epithet *hṛcchaya*, “the one who sleeps in the heart,” and in the context of the verse—Kṛṣṇa’s feet as the destroyer of the sins of surrendered souls—the cowherd women are asking for the death of *kāma*, a death which can only be located in his appeasement, which is seen as the satisfaction of Bhagavān. Thus, the *gopīs*’ supreme love or “*parā-bhakti*” is measured by their abandoning of their own desires and desiring to please Kṛṣṇa. As in their response to Kṛṣṇa’s song, this abandonment is not a matter of willful decision making; it results from being drawn or attracted by the beau-

teous power of Bhagavān, the one power which is seen as being stronger than desire, stronger than *kāma*.

One may object to this vision of love, however, as being inherently absolutist. By "leaving their own homes" are the cowherd women not leaving an unredeemed world as well? By loving the supreme and forsaking all other attachments, are not the cowherd women creating a basic split between supreme and mundane worlds? Texts on *bhakti-sādhana*, in this regard, almost always carry admonitions about associating with outsiders: stories about women, wealth or non-believers should not be listened to, nor should there be association with "free thinking" *yogīs*, *tantrikas*, or other unsavory characters.<sup>47</sup> Could this highly-valued and highly-charged display of devotion actually be another form of the priestly, patriarchal world-denying sensibility? If we look at the *rāsa-līlā* construct in Freudian terms, for example, we have to concede that the "leading male" theory in *Totem and Taboo* is all too present in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, god is the *ādi-puruṣa*—the original and supreme person—and all others are his milkmaids. Moreover, by removing sexuality from the world and into the purely non-material dimension, and by turning men into women (*gopīs* as the highest form of human aspiration), the brahmanical ideology can maintain its position of other-worldliness, even as it absorbs more earth-based local traditions (as Hardy points out). The *gopīs* may revel with Kṛṣṇa, but not in the daylight world. Frenzied self-abandonment may exist as a purified icon, but not in any other form.

Another interesting suggestion behind the explosion of *rasika*, emotional bhakti is the notion discussed by Norvin Hein, that the exaltation of the "divine-romantic" occurs during a time when a powerful deity can no longer be venerated, as in periods of colonial oppression. Hein discusses the prevalence of Viṣṇu's worship as a Royal King or as Narasimha (Viṣṇu as man/lion) before Muslim domination over India and the rise of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti during the period of Muslim control.<sup>48</sup>

Later bhakti practitioners will answer the charge of absolutism by pointing out that the supreme object of love is within everything and everyone. Indeed, Ragunāthadāsa Gosvāmī of Vṛndāvana, a direct disciple of the celebrated bhakta, Caitanya, is said to have offered one thousand daily prostrations to the deity and two thousand daily prostrations to the devotees.<sup>49</sup> Thus, human beings may be seen as embodiments of the all-pervading divinity. This sensibility reaches its apogee in the *sahajiyā* contention, inherited from *tantra*, that one should act as if Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are present in



all women and men, hence obliterating the distinction between sacred and profane.

Interestingly enough, the text of the *Bhāgavata* itself will present a curious epilogue to these chapters. In chapter thirty-five, with just one chapter separating it from the end of the dance, we will again find the *gopīs* singing in separation. Only this time in broad daylight with no *yoga-māyā*. Kṛṣṇa will have returned to “work,” tending the cows, and the cowherd women will have returned to a state of separateness and duality. What was the dance of the night world, then, with its sudden disappearance and the visionary re-union? What was the energy of *yoga-māyā*? Clearly it was not of the day world, the world of convention where the basic condition is one of time and space bound in completeness. It was of another world, a concealed world, an exclusive world, a world of pure love perhaps, but also a world that is hopelessly apart from the “day-world” of human reality.

### The End of *Kāma*

The cowherd women now ask for their life to be revived, remarking that *hari-kathā* is the “life for those afflicted with *tapas*,” the burning fire of both desire and loss. The *gopīs* continually shift their focus between physical and metaphysical. They return to memories of Kṛṣṇa’s smile and loving glances while calling him a *kuhaka*, a “deceiver,” which is the very same word used in the first verse of the Purāṇa, where the absolute is described as being *nirasta kuhakam*—completely free from deceit.<sup>50</sup> Here is another sign of inversion: *kāma* becomes something other than *kāma* as does deceit and trickery, a sort of negative capability in which fire puts out fire. In this extreme condition the *gopīs* abandon all shame and again implore Kṛṣṇa to love them.

O Hero, please spread the nectar of your lips among us. That nectar by which men forget other passions increases our passion and destroys our sorrow as it is well kissed by your vibrating flute.<sup>51</sup>

The next verse offers the conventional image of “one moment seeming like a millennium” as the cowherd women declare that the creator of the eyes has erred in his work, since blinking eyelids hinder their contemplation of Kṛṣṇa’s face. The eye is paired with ultimate object of vision and it is this ultimate nature of Bhagavān which transforms the mundane into the sub-

lime, an extreme sublime beyond any limits of reason of “good sense.”<sup>52</sup> The rest of the chapter continues to pair images of “above” (Kṛṣṇa as *acūṭya* or infallible), and “below,” (Kṛṣṇa as a *kitava* or cheater), of “rising desire” (*hṛc-chayo dayam*) with “the destroyer of the disease of the heart” (*hṛd-rujāṁ yan niṣūdanam*), punctuating the ineffability of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā* conducted under *yoga-māyā*, and highlighting the *Bhāgavata*’s contention that the “love affairs” between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* are, in some way, a reversal of the way things appear to be. This reversal, I would argue, occurs on a much deeper level than the inversion of moral conventions. For the “reversal” of desire completely transforms one’s perception and experience of the world.<sup>53</sup>

The last verse of the songs mirrors the plea in chapter thirty. Here, however, after asking for relief, the *gopīs* show more concern for the state of Kṛṣṇa’s feet than for the burning of their breasts. This indicates the decisive transformation of self-centered desire, and this is where the *Bhāgavata* distinguishes between wanting (or lusting) and loving. One may argue here that there is still a deep double-bind. How can wanting transform into a purified caring when wanting to care is still wanting? But this is where separation and loss come into play. The *Bhāgavata* will insist that it is through the fire of loss and the pain of being abandoned that the clinging ego is transformed. Wanting is not abandoned, it is overwhelmed. Now, and only now, is true meeting possible.

### The Return

When Kṛṣṇa reappears, he is described as *manmatha-manmathah*, literally, “the bewilderer or agitator of the mind of he who bewilders the mind,” or the “cupid of cupids”—*manmathah* is the epithet for Kāma.<sup>54</sup> This is the first time such an epithet is used in these chapters and suggests that Kṛṣṇa has become the new cupid.

Notice that, once again, Kṛṣṇa does not appear from outside but becomes manifest (*āvirabhūt*) or reappears from among them (*tāsām*). The correlation between extreme separation and death continues as their vision of Kṛṣṇa is likened to *prāṇa*, the life force, returning to the body.<sup>55</sup> Even in this meeting sequence, *tapas* is mentioned twice, as the burning fever of separation lingers on before disappearing.<sup>56</sup>

Kṛṣṇa’s subsequent discourse on love discusses various categories of love and reciprocity, as Kṛṣṇa declares that he does not respond to living beings right away in order to intensify their love.

Even when living beings worship me, Oh friends I do not respond in order to advance their following, just as a poor man who has gained wealth and lost it is so filled with anxious thought that he cannot know anything else.<sup>57</sup>

This verse becomes puzzling upon close examination. The obvious association would be from the *Gītā* (IV.11), "As they seek refuge in me, I respond to them."<sup>58</sup> In characteristic fashion, the tenth book, inverts this equation. Here, Bhagavān does not reciprocate according to human desire. Rather, he induces anguish "in order to turn their behavior or following." He has orchestrated the separation for this purpose and explains that while hidden, he was actually reciprocating.

At this final point, however, while extolling the *gopīs*' love, Bhagavān, himself, is at a loss.

Even in a lifetime of the gods, I could not repay my debt to you who are faultless. Loving me, you have severed the difficult chains of your homes. May your reward be your own goodness.<sup>59</sup>

Here, for the first time, the *parā-bhakti* of the cowherd women overcomes Kṛṣṇa. Their love is so strong that he cannot fully reciprocate. The concept of a reward is no longer applicable. Thus, Kṛṣṇa, himself, is defeated by the power of devotion, and one is left with this—the transforming power of devotion—as its own glory. This may also be the first time where there is a genuine mutuality between Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd women, and perhaps this can only occur once Kāma has been transformed.

The dynamic of this transforming power focuses on the cowherd women leaving their homes and all that "home" signifies. By making the *gopīs* not only women but wives and mothers, the *Bhāgavata* radically moves beyond the gripping power of convention and respectability. For the *gopīs* have committed adultery and Kṛṣṇa is a seducer and a deceiver. But their relationship is not merely a surrender to passion; it is a decisive movement away from nature and her conventions, from the solace of the known. The woman who was previously described as the "gateway to hell" is here an exalted paramour. Her love, instead of dragging one down into the "dark well" of household existence, lifts one to the highest levels of aesthetic and devotional contemplation.

Leaving home and/or exile from home has often been seen in the text as a socially disruptive factor, but one that can lead to a higher vision through

renunciation. In this case, the “exile” is actively encouraged. One should get away from “the difficult chains” of one’s home, or at least males should. By inverting the script, and having women leave their home instead of men, the *Bhāgavata* glorifies the most extreme spurning of social convention and may even be tacitly admitting the diseased, upside down nature of those conventions. The fact that cowherd women are seduced and goaded on by God himself legitimizes all of this and—at the least—applies a strong counterbalance to a confining social order. On the other hand, one could read this passage as saying that when the female principle frees itself from entrapment by following the divine call or higher imaginative capacity, no matter what the cost, then and only then is freedom found.

The king, then, must become a *gopī*. For all kingdoms are extended homes, and in this sense extended forms of attachment and binding self-identification. Rather than literalizing this as theologians have done by saying that the soul is female and God is male, I would offer the reading that the soul must turn to its feeling function in order to overcome its “kingly dilemma.” In later Vaiṣṇava narratives, for example, it will be said that when Śiva wants to join in the *rāsa*-dance he is told that he must become a *gopī* in order to participate, and indeed “following in the footsteps of the *gopīs*” will become the major form of *sādhana* or spiritual practice in a number of Vaiṣṇava communities. Whatever this may entail, I would argue that it includes valuing the potential of feeling and of the feminine in general, and seeing it as necessary to create the *rāsa-maṇḍala*, the circle dance that transcends time.

### The Rāsa Dance

The image of the dance itself is one of fulfillment. The text introduces the dance through Śuka’s declaration that the cowherd women abandoned their burning distress born of loss, their hopes now fulfilled through his limbs. Then and there (*tatra*) the dance begins, referred to as *rāsa-kṛīḍām*, the play of Govinda with the “faithful” and “loving” women. All worldly impediments to play have been done away with, which leads to mutuality.

The dance celebration commences with a circle of decorated *gopīs* as Kṛṣṇa, the master of *yoga*, appears between each one of them. Notice here that the subject is the dance, not Kṛṣṇa. The women here, unlike in their condition of *viraha*, are made up (*maṇḍitaḥ*). Remember, we are dealing with an archetypal circle image here, an aesthetic image of fulfillment and

ornamentation, with Kṛṣṇa appearing as “an emerald amidst golden ornaments.”<sup>60</sup>

To complete the aesthetic image an audience is also necessary, and the celestials comply, offering musical accompaniment and showering down flowers to fulfill this role.

At that time, the sky was filled with hundreds of aerial cars of the celestials and their consorts who were overwhelmed with eager longing.

—(BHP X.33.3)

Then comes pure aesthetic descriptions where sight and sound merge.

By the steps of their feet, the gestures of their hands, their smiling, and playful movements of their eyebrows, with their bending waists, moving breasts and clothes, and earrings rolling on their cheeks, the consorts of Kṛṣṇa, who had perspiring faces and loosened braids of hair and girdles, sang of him, shining like lightning in a circle of clouds.

—(BHP X.33.7)

Here, the lightning cannot live without the cloud, as the *gopīs*, whether in union or separation, cannot live without Kṛṣṇa, for they are his *śakti*. One can imagine another form of reversal here, a reversal of the Sāṅkhya image in which the male *puruṣa* is bewildered by the dance of the female *prakṛti* and thus becomes entangled. Here, the female *śakti* is enthralled by the dance of the male *śaktimān* and fully participates in it, a reversal of the “Mohinī equation” discussed previously. Therefore, the image of a dance, along with all of its enjoyments, becomes extraordinarily effective as the “pure-aesthetic” is exalted. Indeed, the singing of the cowherd women is said to pervade the universe.<sup>61</sup>

The *śakti-śaktimān* relationship is described in terms of an image and its reflection, they are both one and many, exalted and “debased.”<sup>62</sup> After dancing, a fatigued Kṛṣṇa enters the water, “Like the lord of elephants along with his female consorts having broken through the dam.”<sup>63</sup> The word *setuḥ* can mean a dam, as in a paddy field where elephants might frolic, or a formal limitation or injunction. The suggestion of course is that all limits have now been broken.

The *līlā* ends and the *siddhānta* or instruction begins with the following verse.

In this way, he whose desires are truth, to whom the group of young women were deeply attached, and whose passion is self-contained, still enjoyed those moonlit nights which are the basis of *rasa* for the narratives and poetry of autumn.<sup>64</sup>

Śuka invokes the *aiśvarya* aspect of Bhagavān (here it speaks of him as *satyakāma*, which Śrīdhara glosses as *icchāśakti*, one who has total free will), pointing out the incongruity between his position and the *gopīs* taking Kṛṣṇa as *kānta*, their lover, and not as a god. For just as love can transform one out of the kingly role, it can transform a monarch-divinity into a lover-divinity.

The instruction and metaphysical explanations of Bhagavān's seeming transgressions continue. There is no point in going into them further, except to note how fully the text is aware of its own transgressive content.<sup>65</sup> But this is also a key. The *rāsa-līlā* itself is magical; it belongs to the realm of *yoga-māyā*, and *parā-bhakti* is divine love which reverses all human conceptions about what love might ever be. Therefore, Śuka ends his *siddhānta* by stating *brahma-rātra upāvyṭte*, which can indicate either a particular hour of the night—the dawn when the *gopīs* would have to return to their homes, or else an entire night of Brahmā, eons of time. This has been the magical meeting, the meeting that both took place (for Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd women under the energy of *yoga-māyā*) and did not take place (for the husbands of the cowherd women who are described as being “bewildered by his *māyā*,” thinking that their wives spent the whole night by their sides). Therefore, although there was a meeting, a separation, and a final meeting, the end result is still ambiguous. But the purported end-result of this narrative is made clear in the final *phala-śruti* verse, which declares that one who hears this narrative with faith obtains bhakti and quickly throws off *kāma*, the “disease of the heart.”<sup>66</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Kakar and Ross, *Tales of Love, Sex, and Danger* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Before Dr. Acyut Lal Bhatt would consent to read these chapters with me, he felt it incumbent upon himself to warn me that a “misreading” of these chapters would land one in hell.

<sup>3</sup> Sanātana Gosvāmī cites the *Nāṭyaśāstra*:

*naṭair gr̥hita-kaṇṭhīnām anyānyāttakara-śrīyām/  
nartakinām bhaved rāso maṇḍalībhūya nartatām//*

Hardy believes it derives from a South Indian performance tradition.

<sup>4</sup> See Hawley, *op. cit.*, (1981), p. 162, "it was supposed that the name of the dance itself, *rās*, is but a permutation of this more encompassing term. Grammatically this is possible. One word can be derived from another by a process called 'increase' (*vyddhi*), and *rās* (with a long *a*) is grammatically the 'increase of *rās*, its concentrated form.'"

<sup>5</sup> I am referring to the *Bhagavadgītā*, II.37, here:

*kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoṅṇa-samudbhavaḥ/  
mahā-śano mahā pāpmā viddhy enam iha vairiṇam//*

<sup>6</sup> To be fair here, it should be noted that later devotees of the god Rāma, known as Rāmānandīs, develop a similar lover-beloved conception of bhakti. See Philip Lutgendorf's "The Secret Life of Rāmacandra in Ayodhya" in Paula Richman's *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> BHP I.4.5

<sup>8</sup> *śrī śuka uvāca/samyag-vyavasitā buddhis-tava rājarṣi-sattama/  
vāsudeva-kathāyām te yaj-jātā naiṣṭiki ratih//  
vāsudevakathā-praśnaḥ puruṣāṁs trīn punāti hi/  
vaktāraṁ pṛcchakaṁ śrotṛṁs tat-pāda-salilam yathā  
—(BHP X.1.16,17)*

<sup>9</sup> This issue is explicitly addressed in the "ātmārāmā" verse:

*ātmārāmās ca munayo nirgranthā apy urukrame  
kurvanty ahaitukīm bhaktim ittham-bhuta-ṅṇo hariḥ  
—(BHP I.7.10)*

<sup>10</sup> Some commentators see "*apī*" as showing the greatness of the *gopīs*. For "although" Kṛṣṇa is *ātmārāmā* or settled in his own pleasure, he is exhilarated by the love of the *gopīs*. See BHP X.29.42:

*iti viklavitam tāsām śrutvā योगेश्वराḥ/  
prahasya sa-dayaṁ/gopīr ātmārāmoḥpyarīramat//*

<sup>11</sup> See Hardy's (*Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) solution here, which turns around a mimesis of the seasons.

<sup>12</sup> *vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhcāri samyogād rasanīṣṭattiḥ* (NSVI.31)

<sup>13</sup> BHP X.29.2

<sup>14</sup> The nine processes of devotion are often conceived of in terms of engaging the three levels of body, mind, and soul in bhakti (BHP VII.5.23,24). The other interesting process that is often related to the practice of bhakti, as in the *Bhaktirasāmṭa-sindhu* of Rūpa Gosvāmī, is the practice of the sixty four “feminine arts” as discussed in the *Kāma-sūtra*.

<sup>15</sup> See BG VII.25; *nāhaṁ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yoga-māyā-samāvṛtaḥ*, in BHP II.7.43, Brahmā declares that he and a few selected others know the *yoga-māyā* of the supreme being. In BHP III.5.22, the sage Maitreya tells Vidura that the *līlā* of Bhagavān unfolds through his *yoga-māyā*. Whereas in BHP VIII.5.43, the entire world of *māyā* is said by Śuka to be brought about by *yoga-māyā*.

<sup>16</sup> Among the many explanations of *yoga-māyā* by the commentators is that this potency is, itself, the flute of Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>17</sup> See *Bṛhat Bhāgavatāmṛtam* of Sanātana Gosvāmī (Madras: Sree Gauḍīya Math, 1975), translated into English by Bhakti Prajñan Yati, Jagadānando-Nāma, pp. 275-312.

<sup>18</sup> Throughout the BHP, *yoga-māyā* is used to indicate a *śakti*, a power or creative potency of the supreme (see II.7.43, III.5.22, VIII.5.42). See Bhattacharya (*The Philosophy of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Santiniketan: Visva Bharati, 1962), Vol. 1, p. 51. for a discussion of these verses. Sheridan (*The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986) relates *yoga-māyā* to allegory.

<sup>19</sup> For Hardy the “sanskritization” effort to follow formal aesthetic conventions here is an attempt to tame “Tamil libido.” Sheridan states, “a god whose love play belongs to the standards of poetic conventions surely is intended to have symbolic meaning. Sheridan (1986), p. 113, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> See S. Bhattacharya (1962), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 127-8.

<sup>21</sup> *priyaḥ priyāyā iva dīrgha darśanaḥ* (BHP X.29.2)

<sup>22</sup> *nīśamya gitāṁ tad anāṅga-varadhanam vraja-striyaḥ kṛṣṇa-grīhita-mānasāḥ*  
—(BHP X.29.4)

<sup>23</sup> BHP VIII.8.46.

<sup>24</sup> The *Arthaśāstra* contains similar declarations: *viśvaso naiva kartavyaḥ striṣu rāja kuleṣu ca*—one should not put one’s faith in a woman or a politician.

<sup>25</sup> *duḥsaha-preṣṭha-viraha-tivra-tāpa-dhutāśubhāḥ/  
dhyāna-prāptācyutāśleṣa-nirvṛtyā kṣīṇa-maṅgalāḥ//*

I am following the commentarial understanding of auspicious and inauspicious as referring to karma.



- 26 BHP. X.29.11
- 27 De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*.
- 28 Viśvanātha Cakravartī has popularized the reading where all of Kṛṣṇa's remarks are filled with their opposing innuendos as are the answers of the *gopīs*. Ten verses spoken by Kṛṣṇa are followed by ten verse rebuttals of the *gopīs* in which each verse can be construed to signify its opposite. Jīva Gosvāmī speaks of Kṛṣṇa as the "master of confusing speech" when referring to these verses.
- 29 *śravaṇād darśanād dhyānān mayi bhāvo'nukīrtanāt/  
na tathā sannikarṣeṇa pratīyāta tato grhān.*  
—(BHP X.29.27)
- 30 *virahajāgny-upayukta-dehā/  
dhyānena yāma padayoḥ padavīm sakhe te.*  
—(BHP X.29.35)
- 31 *vyarocataiṇāṅka ivoḍubhir vṛtah* (BHP X.29.43)
- uttambhayan rati-patīm ramayām cakāra* (BHP X.29.46)
- 32 James D. Reddington (*Vallabhācārya on the Love Games of Kṛṣṇa*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), p. 134.
- 33 See BHP I.6. 1-38.
- 34 Bharata states that the intensity of love reaches its peak when it is impeded by constant obstacles and the meeting of lovers takes place in concealment and that also very rarely. NS I.104.
- 35 *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* I.51
- 36 BHP X.30.3
- 37 *gati-smīta-prekṣaṇa-bhāṣaṇādiṣu/  
priyāḥ priyasya pratirūḍamūrtayaḥ/  
asāv-aham tv iṭy abalās tad-ātmikā  
nyavediṣuḥ kṛṣṇa-vihāra-vibramāḥ*
- 38 BHP. X.30.4
- 39 See David Haberman, *Acting as a Way to Salvation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- 40 BHP. X.30.25,26
- 41 Hardy sees this verse as an interpolated interjection of some "enforcement" priesthood. If one consistently adopted this method, the entire text—in fact, any text—would have to be seen as nothing but interpolations.
- 42 See Vaudeville, "Evolution of Love Symbolism in Bhagavatism" (*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82, 1962)

- 43 *lan-manaskās tad-ālāpās tad viceṣṭās tad-ātmikāḥ/  
tad-guṇān eva gāyanto nātmāgārāṇi sasmaruh//  
punah pulinam āgatya kālindyaḥ kṛṣṇa-bhāvanāḥ/  
samavetā jaguḥ kṛṣṇam tad-āgamana-kāṅkṣitāḥ//*
- 44 Hardy has noted and documented the strongest insertion of South Indian Ālvār poetry and meter here, where separation takes on the mood of *vīpralambha* as opposed to *karuṇā*. Hardy (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 531. The final climactic verse is in *śakvari* (fourteen syllable to a quarter) meter.
- 45 See Hardy, p. 535
- 46 BHP X.31.7
- 47 See, for example, *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*, 61.
- 48 Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathura* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1972)
- 49 cites in Steven Rosen, *The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan* (New York: Folk Books, 1990)
- 50 BHP I.1.1, X.31.10
- 51 *surata-vardhanam śoka-nāśanam svarita-veṇunā suṣṭhu cumbitam/  
itara-rāga-vismāraṇam nṛṇām vilara vira nas te' dharāmṛtam* (BHP. X.31.14)
- 52 *kuṣṭhila-kuntalam śrīmukhaṁ ca te jaḍa udikṣatām pakṣma-kṛd dṛṣām* (BHP. X.31.15)
- 53 In BHP. X.31.16, both *acutya*—infallible or unfallen, and *kitava*—rogue, fraud, or cheater, are addressed to Kṛṣṇa in the vocative case. The “rising desire” of verse seventeen is contrasted with the “heart disease” of verse 18.
- 54 More precisely, *manmatha* is derived from *math* or *manth*, to churn or agitate, and later, to destroy. The earliest Vedic usage is with Agni, producing fire from the friction of churning sticks. This form may be an intensive or *math*, but is most probably a compound with *man* for “mind.” Thus, Kāma personified is he who churns or agitates (destroys) the mind.
- 55 *tam vilokyāgatam preṣṭham prīty-utphulla-dṛṣo 'balāḥ/  
uttasthur yugapat sarvaḥ tanvaḥ prāṇam ivāgatam* (BHP X.32.3)
- 56 BHP X.32.5 (*santaptā stanayor adhāt*), BHP X.32.9 (*jahur viraha-jam tāpam*)
- 57 *nāham tu sakhyo bhajato 'pi jantūn bhajāmy amiśām anuvṛti-vṛttaye/  
yathādhano labdha-dhane vinaṣṭe tac-cintayān yannibhṛto na veda//  
—(BHP X.32.20)*
- 58 *ye yathā mām prapadyante tāms tathaiva bhajāmy aham.*
- 59 *na pāraye haṁ niravadya-saṁyujām/  
sva-sādhū-kṛtyaṁ vibudhāyusaḥpi vaḥ//  
yā mābhajan durjara-geha-sṛṅkhalāḥ/  
saṁvṛṣya tad vaḥ pratiyātu sādhunā// —(BHP X.32.22)*

60 *madhye maṇinām haimānām mahā-marakato yathā*

"He appeared like a great emerald in the midst of jeweled-gold" (BHP X.33.6)

61 Some of the *sampradāya* commentators construe this verse (BHP X.33.8) to mean that all the principal *rāgas* originate with the *gopīs*.

62 *svapratibimba-vibramah* (BHP X.33.17)

63 BHP X.33.22

64 *evam śaśāṅkāṁśu-virājitā niśāḥ sa satya-kāmo'nuratābalā-gaṇaḥ/  
siṣeva ātmany avaruddha-saurataḥ sarvāḥ śarat-kāvya-kathā-rasāśrayāḥ//*  
—(BHP X.33.25)

65 One can easily see why one would be tempted to see the *siddhānta* as the text's attempt to rationalize the appropriation of "other sources." For the instructions cannot encompass the magical nature of the contents.

66 *vikriḍitam vraja-vadhūbhir idam ca viṣṇoḥ  
śraddhānvito 'nuśṛṇuyād atha varṇayet yaḥ/  
bhaktim parām bhagavati pratilabhya kāmāḥ/  
hṛd-rogam āśvapahinoty acireṇa dhīraḥ//*  
—(BHP. X.33.39)

Śrīdhara strongly emphasizes "victory over *kāma*" (*kāmavijayam eva phalam āha*) as the result of hearing and describing (*varṇayet*) this text.

## RĀSALILĀ PANCĀDHYĀYA: THE *BHĀGAVATA*'S ULTIMATE VISION OF THE GOPĪS

Graham M. Schweig

### 1. Background on the Gopīs in the *Bhāgavata*'s Rāsailā

The young cowherd maidens of Vraja, who are known as “the Gopīs,” are honored by certain traditions within Vaishnavism<sup>1</sup> as the ultimate example of devotion to God. The most revered, contemplated and worshipped presentation of the Gopīs for these traditions is, without doubt, the Purāṇic presentations of the Gopīs found within the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, especially the five chapters known as the Rāsailā Pañcādhyāya (“the five chapters of the Rāsa dance episode”).<sup>2</sup> Throughout the *Bhāgavata*'s Rāsailā story, various types of behavior and emotions of the Gopīs are displayed which dominate the whole episode, and which the Caitanya school of Vaishnavism accepts as the highest level of worship in *bhakti*, or devotion, to the intimate deity Krishna. The followers of certain sects of Krishna *bhakti* within Vaishnavism for whom the Rāsailā is considered the most profound revelation of divine love, recognize that the most intimate and intensely loving devotion to God is found in the behavior and emotions of the Gopīs. Although there are other loving episodes between Krishna and the Gopīs presented in the *Bhāgavata* text, it is especially the portrayal of the Gopīs in the Rāsailā that Vaishnava devotees from the Caitanya school, as well as other schools, worship as the ultimate portrait of perfect devotion to Krishna.

In this short study, the specific presentations of the Gopīs surrounding the Rāsalilā passage are reviewed and the specific events within the Rāsalilā story are outlined in order to present the different portraits of the Gopīs, capturing the different phases of their emotions and behavior. In places, the particular importance or meaning of the Rāsalilā for teachers of the Gauḍiya (Caitanya) school will be presented when relevant.

The Rāsalilā episode comprises only five chapters of verse in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Of the approximately 18,000 verses of the whole *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* text distributed among a total of 335 chapters, the five contiguous chapters known as the Rāsalilā Pañcādhyāya consist of a total of only 172 verses.<sup>3</sup> The Rāsalilā Pañcādhyāya embodies the narrative of the five chapters (BhP 10.29-10.33)<sup>4</sup> of the *Bhāgavata* text leading up to and containing the specific event of the *rāsa* dance within the entire episode.

The episode of the Rāsalilā is located in two other Purāṇic texts in addition to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: the *Harivaṁśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. In his phenomenological study of the comparison of these three literatures, Noel Sheth has made some observations that are well worth noting here, especially with specific reference to the Rāsalilā. Differences between the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* version of the Rāsalilā and that of the *Harivaṁśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* versions are in the story itself, to a degree, but can be seen primarily in the theological reflection in the Rāsalilā episode, and specifically in the explicit recognition of the divinity of Krishna. Sheth states that "The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is much more aware of the divinity of Krishna than the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and it displays this consciousness also in its various efforts to justify his behaviour."<sup>5</sup> The Caitanya school of Vaishnavism thus concentrates on the *Bhāgavata* because of its theological emphasis on the Rāsalilā. In the *Harivaṁśa* there is a more "earthly, physical portrayal of Krishna's amorous adventures with the herdsmaiden girls,"<sup>6</sup> and this less devotional approach to Krishna's identity and divinity was apparently less attractive to those in the Caitanya school and other Vaishnava schools as well. While the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* "transforms the purely secular love between the women and Krishna depicted in the *Harivaṁśa* into a religious love of devotion,"<sup>7</sup> this version was still unsatisfactory for Krishna *bhaktas*. It was the more intense devotion and explicit theism of the *Bhāgavata* that was to completely satisfy them. The *Bhāgavata* version has been the most celebrated and honored source of the episode, whereas the episodes within the *Harivaṁśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, found in less theologically rich and poetically elaborate forms, have not attracted nearly the same attention.<sup>8</sup> Especially for the Caitanya school of Vaishnavism, for

whom this episode is held as the most sacred and ultimate culmination of all other *līlās* of Krishna, the *Bhāgavata* is the authoritative text.

The name Rāsalīlā<sup>9</sup> most commonly refers to the ancient Purāṇic story of Krishna, who is the divinity and dramatic “hero” of love, attracting the cowherd maidens, the “Gopīs,” who are his beloved consorts and dramatic “heroines” of love, to meet him one enchanting autumn evening under the full moon, in the forest of Vraja, the natural setting for the Rāsalīlā. After their initial meeting in the forest, Krishna disappears from the Gopīs, and the Gopīs search desperately for him. Not finding Krishna anywhere, they pray to him in supplication and song, expressing their emotions toward him and remembrances of him. Krishna suddenly returns and appears to the Gopīs, expressing his love for them. Finally, the episode reaches its apex when Krishna, together with the Gopīs, dances and sings in the dance known as the *rāsa*.

Interestingly, the name Rāsalīlā is not found anywhere within the text of the episode itself. One very similar phrase by which the episode is also known, having essentially the same meaning, is *rāsa-kṛīḍā*, and it is found in the second verse of the fifth chapter. The word *līlā* or *kṛīḍā* means literally “play.” The word “*rāsa*” indicates a certain ancient dance form which is comprised of a circular formation of many female dancers, whose hands or arms are interlocked with one another in a chain-like manner, and around whose necks the arms of their male dance partners are placed. In the fifth and final chapter of the “*līlā*,” or play of Krishna’s *rāsa* dance with the Gopīs, however, it is Krishna who, by duplicating himself from the center of the *rāsa* circle through his mystic power, becomes the sole male partner for each and every Gopī. While remaining at the center of the *rāsa-maṇḍala*, or “circle of the *rāsa* dance,” Krishna stands with his most favored but secretly named Gopī, who is understood by the Caitanya school to be the supremely loving goddess Rādhā. As the Gopīs move in the circular dance, each experiencing the exclusive attention of Krishna, they sing songs of love in harmony with Krishna, and in chorus, as the percussive sounds of the bells on their ankles and belts tingle, and their bracelets clang to the rhythmic movements of their forms. During this dance celestial beings shower flowers down and join in with song and drums from the heavens. The dance takes place in the paradisaal forest of Vraja, in which the lotus flowers, full fruit trees and honey bees all come alive at night under the full moon during the harvest season of autumn.

## 2. Rāsalilā as Highest Līlā for Caitanya School

The *Bhāgavata*'s Rāsalilā has had an enormous influence on the Vaishnava traditions of Krishna *bhakti*. Influential teachers from the Caitanya school express how the Rāsalilā, especially as it is presented in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata*, represents the heart of their divine revelation of love of God. For example, the author of the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Krishnadāsa Kavirāja, certainly one of the most important theologians of the school, recognizes that among all of Krishna's intimate relationships, the *mādhurya* relationship with the Gopīs is the highest, and thus he refers throughout his great work to the Rāsalilā as the leading episode of all *līlās*, by such phrases as *rāsādika* and *rāsādi* ("the Rāsalilā and other related *līlās*"),<sup>10</sup> and in fact calls the Rāsalilā the *līlā-sāra* ("essence of all *līlās*"). An important later teacher of the Caitanya school, Viśvanātha Cakravartin, calls the Rāsalilā the *sarva-līlā-cūḍa-maṇi* ("the crown-jewel of all *līlās*").<sup>11</sup> An attempt is made here in this study to consider the following questions: Was it the intention of the *Bhāgavata* author to present the Rāsalilā episode as special among all other *līlās*? What theological expressions or literary characteristics could indicate this special status of the Rāsalilā story that many *bhakti* teachers from the Caitanya school of Vaishnavism claim?

There are many indications from the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* of the importance that the Rāsalilā has for the tradition. Caitanya praises Śuka, the narrator of the *Bhāgavata* text, as "the artist who created the Rāsalilā of Krishna, like the pure earring out of a conchshell."<sup>12</sup> Krishnadāsa explains in the following verses how Caitanya himself, during full moon autumn nights, would be affected when recalling the verses of the Rāsalilā:

He wandered from garden to garden  
looking around with anticipation  
while hearing and reciting the verses and  
songs of the Rāsalilā.

The master, absorbed in *prema*,  
was singing and dancing and  
sometimes, absorbed in emotional love,  
was imitating the Rāsalilā.

Sometimes in the madness of emotional love  
the master would run here and there;

sometimes he would fall to the ground and sometimes  
he would roll on the ground and become unconscious.

When he would hear one verse  
of the Rāsalilā recited,  
he would then explain the meaning  
as he had previously done.

Thus whatever verses were presented  
from the Rāsalilā,  
he would give the meaning of all of them, and  
sometimes he would experience happiness or sadness.  
(CC III 18.5-9)

Moreover, in still another example, Caitanya becomes completely unaware of the external world upon hearing passages from the Rāsalilā, and a reading from it becomes the only way by which the Orissan king, Pratāparudra, could gain the audience of Caitanya. Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya, the intimate associate of Caitanya, recommended to Mahārāja Pratāparudra the following plan to gain Caitanya's audience by reading the passages from the Rāsalilā without revealing his identity as the king:

*kṛṣṇa-rāsa-pañcādhyāya' karite paṭhana  
ekale yāi' mahāprabhura dharibe caraṇa*

Perform a reading from the five chapters  
on the Rāsa dance of Krishna  
and you, as the only one there [with Caitanya in the Guṇḍicā temple],  
will catch the feet of the great master [Caitanya].

We learn later that the king surreptitiously succeeded in gaining the audience of Caitanya by dressing as a Vaishnava rather than as a king (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā* 14.4ff). All alone with Caitanya in a garden, the king "began to recite [the middle chapter of] the Rāsalilā Pancādhyāya, starting with the chapter [beginning with] the verse [starting with the words] 'jayati te 'dhikam'." (Cc, *Madhya*, 14.8) After the king recited the ninth verse, "Caitanya became immersed in *prema* and got up and embraced him" (Cc, *Madhya*, 14.10) and continued to recite the ninth verse, quoted in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Madhya*, 14.13), over and over.

These verses of Krishnadāsa Kavirāja clearly express the importance that the Rāsalilā had to Caitanya.



Additionally, Krishnadāsa recognizes that the *Bhāgavata* text itself indicates that the Rāsaliḷā possesses a special status among all the other divine episodes in the life of Krishna. He quotes a certain verse from the well-known 47th chapter of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata*, which appears many chapters after the Rāsaliḷā Pañcādhyāya (Chapters 29-33). This verse from the 47th chapter is clearly important to Krishnadāsa in his great work of the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, demonstrated by the fact that he quotes it fully in three different places within his text.<sup>13</sup> In this verse, Krishna's very dear devotee and messenger to the Gopīs, Uddhava, expresses his appreciation for the superlative devotion of the Gopīs even while they are experiencing Krishna's absence. Uddhava expresses that no one else excels the devotion that the Gopīs have for Krishna, and he also recognizes that the Gopīs must have received a special grace from the Lord:

O, such a grace was never bestowed  
 not even upon the person of Śrī  
 whose intimacy [with the Lord] is very great,  
 nor on celestial women whose complexion and scent  
 is like that of a lotus flower,  
 what to speak of others.  
 In the festival of the Rāsa dance,  
 his arms, which were strong,  
 embraced the necks  
 of those beautiful ladies of Vraja  
 whose desires were being fulfilled  
 during that event.  
 (BhP 10.47.60)

Thus the *Bhāgavata* text here indeed expresses the ultimacy and greatness of the Gopīs and their devotion to Krishna in the Rāsaliḷā passage in a way that elevates the episode to a special status that indeed the Caitanya school and other Vaishnava traditions recognize.

### 3. The Narrative Frames of the *Bhāgavata*

The *Bhāgavata* consists of essentially a multi-layered discourse. It is clear from the beginning of the very first book of the *Bhāgavata* that while Vyāsa is the ultimate author of the *Bhāgavata*, it is initially the assembly of sages at the Naimiṣa forest who establish the outer layer of discourse by inquiring

from the sage Sūta, the general narrator of the *Bhāgavata*. Sūta in turn narrates the vision of the narrator of the *Bhāgavata* stories, the sage Śuka. The questions of the assembled sages to Sūta are many, but representative of these questions are the following two verses:

O Sūta, intelligent one, please therefore describe  
the auspicious narratives of the divine descents of God (*avatāra*), Hari,  
who, by the magical power (*māyayā*) of his own supreme self,  
engages in his own [revelational] display (*līlā*).

For we shall not ever be satiated  
in hearing about the displays of strength (*vikrame*) of the Lord,  
whose praises are glorified (*uttama-śloka*) by those who know  
the incomparable sweetness (*svādu svādu*) of spiritual experience  
(*rasa-jñānām*) at every moment (*paḍe paḍe*).  
(BhP 1.1.18-19)

Thus the first narrative is of Vyāsa, the compiler of the Vedas, who reveals the dialogue between Sūta and the sages assembled at Naimiṣa. The second narrative is of Sūta, who reveals the dialogue between the sage Śuka and the king Parīkṣit. Within this second narrative frame, we learn about the King, whose death is imminent due to a curse from a small Brahmin boy, and who inquires from the sage Śuka as follows:

Therefore I am inquiring from you,  
the supreme teacher of all mystics,  
about ultimate perfection,  
and what a person of this world should do,  
in every way,  
who is about to die.  
(BhP 1.19.37)

To this seminal question of the King, the sage Śuka responds with the greater part of the *Bhāgavata* text, which constitutes the third narrative layer. The *Bhāgavata* text, therefore, consists mostly of this third narrative layer, Śuka's narrations to Parīkṣit, including various stories of great personalities and the *līlās* of Krishna, each punctuated throughout by philosophical explanations and discourse by the narrator, Śuka.

The Rāsālīlā-Pañcādhyāya is also included as part of this third layer narrative within the Tenth Book of the text. The serious reader of the *Bhāgavata* views the Rāsālīlā episode through a rich complex of "frame stories," each

outer frame enclosing another inner one, until finally the picture of the Rāsalilā is adequately displayed. The Rāsalilā passage of the *Bhāgavata* opens up immediately with Śuka as the closest narrator of the Rāsalilā episode, and it is his voice that is heard throughout the story. Throughout the *Bhāgavata*, Śuka is the poet who narrates stories to and converses with Parīkṣit, who is the king in the submissive role of Śuka's student. Most of the stories or narrations of the *Bhāgavata* begin with an introductory line, adjunct to the opening verse itself (i.e., just before the first quarter line of the poetically metered verses), and the Rāsalilā is no exception. Just before the first verse are the words *śrī-bādarāyaṇir uvāca*, "the revered Bādarāyaṇi spoke." Here Śuka is introduced by the name Bādarāyaṇi (in some editions of the text), only at the outset of the Rāsalilā passage, to remind or to inform the reader that Śuka is the son of Bādarāyaṇa, or Vyāsa, the original compiler of the Vedas. Therefore, Śuka is not only a sage recognized by the king and assembly of sages accompanying him; he is also the son of the divinely empowered sage Vyāsa, who compiled the *Bhāgavata*, imputing authority to his narration from the beginning.

The conversation between Śuka and King Parīkṣit is being narrated by Sūta to his audience, which consists of Śaunaka and his group of sages. In the *Bhāgavata*, however, even Sūta and Śaunaka's conversation is obviously narrated as well. Effectively, the Rāsalilā is delivered to us, the reader, through a multi-layered conversation within which the narrations of other conversations are taking place. We, the reader, are receiving the story through the narrator and author, Vyāsa, who narrates the conversation between Sūta and Śaunaka, within whose conversation the dialogue between Śuka and Parīkṣit is narrated, within whose discussion the Rāsalilā episode is narrated to Parīkṣit and to us, the reader.

The vision that Śuka shares with his student, Parīkṣit, is not only *what* he sees, but the *way* he sees it, i.e., interprets it. When Śuka reveals the poetic narrative and descriptions of the Rāsalilā, he acts as a bard and sage. Whereas, when he discusses and reflects upon the stories he presents, he acts as the theologian who interprets what is revealed. Both Śuka the bard and Śuka the theologian are found within the passage of the Rāsalilā, and specific essential features of the Rāsalilā are presented by the bard and by the theologian, which are further elaborated upon by commentators.

#### 4. The Gopī Framework in the Tenth Book

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is made up of twelve books or cantos. In the first nine books are narrations of stories of devotees and saints, various gods and demons, stories of creation and liberation, presentations of the various manifestations of God as Vishnu, and theological discourses on *bhakti*. The Tenth Book stands out not only because it is by far the largest of the twelve books, consisting of 90 chapters, but because it is in this book that all of the *līlās* of God as Krishna are presented. The Tenth Book is devoted exclusively to Krishna in his various relationships with demons and devotees. This book is about Krishna's birth, his childhood, his youth along with his boy-friends and girlfriends, and his activities in royalty. The collectively vast material presented in the other nine books leading up to the Tenth Book, along with the Eleventh and Twelfth Books, including their recapitulations, reflections and afterthoughts on the materials presented, form a literary frame around the extensive Tenth Book. While the complete *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* forms the outer frame for the Tenth Book, the surrounding chapters within the Tenth Book form the immediate framework for the Rāsālīlā episode.

The only places preceeding the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata* in which the Gopīs are referred to are in the Second and Third Books, appearing only once in each. In a chapter introducing and explaining the various incarnations of Krishna in the Second Book, one verse acknowledges the Gopīs by mentioning that Krishna kills the demon *dhanada-anuga*, "the follower of heavenly treasurer," whose name is Śaṅkhacūḍa, who tries to "kidnap some of the young maidens of Vraja" (*vraja-bhṛt vadhūnām*, the Gopīs). These are maidens in whom "loving passion is aroused" (*uddīpita-sma-  
ra-rujām*) and with whom Krishna "plays in the forest at night" (*kṛīḍan vane  
nīśi*).<sup>14</sup> In the Third Book, the *rāsa* dance itself is referred to as *strīṇām  
maṇḍala*, "the circle of ladies," and is mentioned in the last verse of the second chapter:

Regarding the mood of those nights  
brightened by the rays of the autumn moon,  
he (Krishna) enjoyed singing sweet songs  
as the ornament in the circle of ladies.<sup>15</sup>  
(BhP 3.2.34)

This verse is the last to mention the Gopīs and their dance of divine love, until the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata*.

The five chapters of the Rāsalilā episode are presented approximately one third of the way through the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata*. Preceding the Rāsalilā chapters, and following them as well, within this Tenth Book, are short references, whole verses, parts of chapters and even complete chapters concerning the Gopīs. The overall effect of these Gopī anticipatory and reminiscent passages surrounding the Rāsalilā chapters is that of a rich border of events, framing the central picture of events of the Rāsalilā. This framework surrounding the Rāsalilā event, including other *līlās* of intimacy within the Tenth Book, also contains woven elements of amorous devotion to God, making the Rāsalilā an inseparable and continuous text with the rest of the Tenth Book. Finally, the framework has the effect of elevating the Rāsalilā to a special place in the whole of the text. This literary framework within the epic is probably one of the factors that leads the Caitanya school to speak of the Rāsalilā as the supreme *līlā* among all others.

The Gopīs are first announced in the Tenth Book through brief passing references within verses, appearing as early as Chapter 15. How the Gopīs please Krishna with their affectionate glances is presented briefly (BhP 10.15.7), and that the Gopīs are embraced by Krishna is also mentioned (BhP 10.15.8). The first complete verse about the Gopīs, in the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata*, is at the end of Chapter 19. Here it is described that Krishna returns home after swallowing the forest fire. He performs such a daring feat in order to protect his cowherd friends, along with the cows and calves. Krishna enters the village of Vrindaban with his friends, while playing his flute, and at this point, the narrator concludes the chapter by introducing the Gopīs:

The greatest bliss for the Gopīs  
was in the vision of Govinda.  
Each moment without him  
became like hundreds of ages.<sup>16</sup>

This verse introducing the Gopīs who were amorously attracted to Krishna (as opposed to the more motherly or elderly Gopīs of the village),<sup>17</sup> introduces perfectly the sentiments of the Gopīs, feelings of being with Krishna and being absent from Krishna simultaneously. This verse anticipates these two primary themes which appear in the Rāsalilā about ten chapters later, toward the end of the twentieth chapter. The Gopīs, in separation from Krishna, are mentioned in the following two verses:

The moon took away the heat  
 born of the rays of the autumn sun  
 for all beings,  
 as wisdom takes away that [suffering]  
 which is born of the [false] pride of  
 [being identified with] the body (*dehābhimāna-jam*)  
 and as Mukunda can take away [the pain of separation]  
 from the ladies of Vraja.<sup>18</sup>  
 (BhP 10.20.42)

Being embraced by a temperate breeze (balanced  
 in coolness and warmth)  
 moving through the forest and the flowers,  
 people were relieved from the heat,  
 except the Gopīs  
 whose hearts were stolen by Krishna.<sup>19</sup>  
 (BhP 10.20.45)

In these verses, the reader is again being informed by the narrator that the Gopīs cannot be satisfied by anything or anyone other than Krishna.

The literary framework surrounding the Rāsalilā story has another significant function, that of providing support for the episode. Chapters 21 and 22 represent the two major chapters concerning the Gopīs prior to the presentation of the Rāsalilā, and therefore are worth reviewing here to see how they contribute to the innermost frame of the Rāsalilā Pañcādhyāya. In Chapter 21, the Gopīs sing praises about the power of Krishna's flute music and how it affects all the residents of Vraja, indeed all of creation as well. The first six verses of Chapter 21 are the narrative description of how the Gopīs were inspired to remember Krishna by the sounds of his flute. The narrator explains that when the Gopīs would hear the flute music of Krishna off in the distance while he was with his fellow cowherd friends, they would converse about Krishna's acts and become overwhelmed with intense love, to the point of becoming speechless. When the Gopīs became speechless due to being stunned by love, they were quiet enough to again hear Krishna's flute, which perpetuated this chain reaction to the divine music:

Thus [after becoming speechless due to being overwhelmed by  
 remembrance of him],

O king, the ladies of Vraja [the Gopīs]  
 hearing the flute music [of Krishna]  
 which steals the minds of all beings  
 caused them to continue to describe [Krishna's acts]  
 and embrace one another.<sup>20</sup>  
 (BhP 10.21.6.)

The next thirteen verses are the words of the Gopīs conversing with one another about Krishna, in verses consistently flowing in fourteen-syllable quarter-verse meter. The narrator uses the last verse of the chapter to explain the affective and devotional state of the Gopīs with the recurring phrase *tan-mayatā* in the Gopī passages of the *Bhāgavata*:

Thus the Gopīs, who were describing to each other  
 the various ways of Bhagavān's plays (*krīḍā*),  
 achieved a state of being  
 fully absorbed in him (*tan-mayatā*).<sup>21</sup>  
 (BhP 10.21.20)

The narrator, according to Jīva, characterizes the Gopīs' state of being as "*tan-mayatā*," indicating, as I discuss elsewhere, the inner state of total transformation of self in divine love, often associated with the state of separation (*viraha*). In this state, the self is taken over by the beloved object from a distance. The complimentary state to *tan-mayatā* is the state described as "*taparatā*," i.e., the total dedication or transition of self in a state of divine love, often associated with the state of union between the self and God. In this state, the self is utterly abandoned for the sake of being with the beloved. Jīva, in his *Prīti Sandarbha*, draws these two phrases out of the *Bhāgavata* text to describe the "internal" and "external" states of the Gopīs.

Thus Chapter 21 prepares the reader for the Gopīs' irresistible attraction to the sounds of Krishna's flute, by which they were allured at the beginning of the Rāsaliḷā. This powerful force is also anticipated by earlier passages in the tenth book. The Gopīs, once hearing Krishna's flute music, gave up everything to be with Krishna, including their homes, families, fathers and husbands, even their material bodies: "Thus any worldly bondage was immediately destroyed and they each relinquished a body composed of material qualities," *jahur guṇa-mayaṁ dehaṁ sadyaḥ prakṣiṇa-bandhanāḥ* (RLP 1.11). Many chapters prior to the Rāsaliḷā episode, the Gopīs experienced extraordinary attraction to Krishna, especially when they heard the music

he made with the flute:

Those ladies of Vraja, having heard the music of the flute,  
experienced passion arising in them.

Some of them began talking about Krishna privately  
to their intimate friends.

(BhP 10.21.3)

The music caused them to speak to each other about Krishna and they became stunned, unable to speak further:

When they began to speak [to each other]  
they would remember the activities of Krishna.

Those whose minds were agitated by the force of passion  
were not capable of continuing [to speak], O king.

(BhP 10.21.4)

Viśvanātha, one of the commentators from the Caitanya school, explains from these two verses above that the Gopīs would be caught throughout the day in this endless cycle of hearing Krishna's flute from a distance, which would in turn cause the Gopīs to talk about Krishna. As they would talk about Krishna, they would be overwhelmed by their emotions to the point of becoming speechless. When they were speechless, it became quiet enough to hear Krishna's flute once again from a distance, and then the Gopīs would begin speaking to each other still again. In this way, this meditative cycle of the Gopīs would be perpetually in motion throughout their day.

Eventually the Gopīs' attraction to Krishna increased to the point where they desperately prayed to the goddess Kātyāyāni in Chapter 22, in order to make Krishna their husband. In the following verse from the next chapter, each of the Gopīs prayed:

O Kātyāyāni, one whose power is very great (*mahā-māyā*),  
O great mystic *yoginī*, O supremely controlling goddess,  
O *devī*, I offer my respects unto you.

Please make the cowherd son of Nanda my husband!

(BhP 10.22.4)

Thus the Gopīs approach *Māyā* for her assistance in love in Chapter 22, and Krishna himself also depends upon *yoga-māyā* for his loving interactions with



the Gopīs in the very first verse of the Rāsalilā. In fact, out of the several hundred uses of the word *māyā* throughout the whole *Bhāgavata* text, the appearance of this word in this first verse is the only instance in which Krishna depends upon *māyā* (*yoga-māyām upāsṛitaḥ*) for his own need. This special application of *māyā* itself is another subtle indication of the special place that the Rāsalilā has in the *Bhāgavata*.<sup>22</sup>

The chapter in which the above prayer of the Gopīs occurs (BhP 10.22.4) is found within the *vastra-haraṇa-līlā*, Krishna's "līlā of stealing clothes" from the Gopīs. Thus many chapters earlier than the Rāsalilā episode, it was already understood that the Gopīs desired Krishna more than anything else in their lives. Finally their desire was awarded in the episode of the Rāsalilā. The adversary of the Gopīs was clearly their worldly obligation to proper moral conduct, duty to family, children, husbands and fathers. But this was no great adversary since "their very selves had already been stolen by Govinda," *govindāpahṛtāmānaḥ* (RLP 1.8). It could be argued that Krishna's sudden disappearance from the Gopīs in the first chapter was an adversarial force. But Krishna, later in the fourth chapter, explains to the Gopīs that they were never out of his sight and that he disappeared only to increase their love for him.

The Gopīs' loving union with Krishna is also anticipated in Chapter 22 when they pray to the goddess Kātyāyanī, as reviewed above. After Krishna playfully steals the garments of the Gopīs while they are bathing in the river Yamunā, and they retrieve their garments from him, he promises them, "you will enjoy these nights (to come)" *mayemā raṁsyatha kṣapāḥ* (BhP 10.22.27). These two chapters, Chapters 21 and 22, are fully devoted to the presentation of the Gopīs, and therefore lend support to the Rāsalilā episode.

References, verses, passages and whole chapters devoted to the Gopīs are also found following the Rāsalilā chapters. There are at least two major chapters presenting almost exclusively the behavior of the Gopīs in Krishna's absence. In Chapter 35, the Gopīs sing songs of Krishna's *līlās* whenever he goes off into the forest with his cowherd boyfriends. The Gopīs, as in Chapter 21 prior to the Rāsalilā episode, once again describe Krishna's flute playing and the effect it has on Vraja's bulls, deer, cows, rivers, trees and creepers, bees, lake-dwelling birds, clouds, the heavenly beings and finally themselves. The Gopīs also describe Krishna's glorious return from the forest and how he is greeted by various gods on the way. Chapter 39 contains a passage that begins the theme of Krishna's pro-

longed separation in Mathurā, as Krishna and his friends prepare to leave for the city. Just before leaving, he tries to pacify the Gopīs with loving glances and a promise that he will send a messenger. The eyes of the Gopīs follow Krishna's chariot until they can no longer see it, and they turn back singing about Krishna's *līlās*, without any hope of ever seeing him again. The other chapter devoted fully to the Gopīs, Chapter 47, focuses on the theme of Krishna's prolonged separation from the Gopīs after he had gone off to Mathurā. Krishna sends his messenger Uddhava to appease the Gopīs, who is amazed as he witnesses the intense devotional madness of the Gopīs for Krishna.

The lengthy 47th Chapter is significant because it is in this chapter that the messenger Uddhava witnesses and acknowledges the intensely passionate devotion (indeed, devotional madness) of the Gopīs, and therefore desires to worship them for their supreme mood of love for Krishna. Verses 23-28 are Uddhava's words praising the Gopīs for their devotion to Krishna which is beyond the attainment of most sages. He refers to their abandonment of family, home, etc., that occurs in the Rāsālīlā episode, and feels that these greatly fortunate ladies have bestowed upon him their mercy:

Love of the whole heart (*sarvātmā-bhāva*)  
is possessed by you [Gopīs] for Adhokṣaja,  
O most fortunate ones, in your separation.

This greatness [of your love] is bestowed upon me as grace.<sup>23</sup>  
(BhP 10.47.27)

Here Uddhava appreciates the full love of the Gopīs for Krishna that persists even more intensely during their time of separation from Krishna.

Uddhava relates the message containing several essential points from Krishna to the Gopīs. The first point Krishna makes through Uddhava is that "you were never apart from me, for I am the Soul of all," *bhavatīmām viyogo me na hi sarvātmanā kvacit* (BhP 10.47.29). Krishna explains aspects of his all-pervading *aīśvarya* power and how he is therefore always present. By verse 34, he begins to be more personal with the Gopīs when he states the following:

I, who am indeed dear to your sight,  
am now far way from you.

However, for the purpose of intensely attracting your minds,

this was my desire to increase your meditation on me.<sup>24</sup>  
(BhP 10.47.34)

As the minds of women are fully absorbed  
in their beloved when he is far away,  
so when he is present before their eyes  
he is not as much in their thoughts.<sup>25</sup>  
(BhP 10.47.35)

A similar statement is made by Krishna in Chapter 4 of the *Rāsālilā*, in the following verse:

O friends, however,  
for the purpose of strengthening their love,  
I may not return love  
even to those living beings who love me.  
As a person who at first has no treasure  
and when obtaining such a treasure loses it,  
such a person knows nothing else  
and becomes filled with no other thought  
except for regaining that treasure.  
(RLP 4.20)

Krishna further assures the Gopīs in the verse that follows the above that because of their single-pointed meditation on him, they “will obtain him soon uninterruptedly,” *nityam acirān mām upaiśyatha* (BhP 10.47.36). Moreover, Krishna explains that those Gopīs who were not able to join him during the night of the *rāsa* dance were still fortunate, precisely because they were meditating fully upon him and his *līlā*.

Some of the Gopīs who had gone inside their homes  
who were unable to leave,  
being fully absorbed in love for him,  
meditated on Krishna with their eyes closed.

They removed all inauspiciousness by the intense pain  
of intolerable separation from their beloved.  
Even their good merits were destroyed  
by the joy of embracing Acyuta,  
which they achieved through meditation.  
(RLP 1.9-10)

There are other complete passages within chapters that follow that focus upon the Gopīs and their devotion to Krishna, as well as some brief references within verses throughout the remaining chapters of the Tenth Book, all the way up to the last chapter in which Krishna's smiling face is said to increase the passion of the Gopīs (BhP 10.90.48). The Rāsalilā indeed is decorated by smaller and larger passages, before and after its episode, that serve to infuse it with even greater importance and weight than the episode itself already carries. Thus the episode has a framework that supports, explains, anticipates and mirrors it.

### 5. General Outline of the Rāsalilā Story

The structure of the Rāsalilā text is most obviously perceived by its appearance in the *Bhāgavata* as a group of five consecutive chapters. Each of the five chapters which comprise the whole of the episode form natural phases in the development of the Rāsalilā story. These five chapters of the Rāsalilā are not formally titled in the original text. However, I have given the chapters terse titles to indicate the types of encounters that occur between Krishna and the Gopīs. They are the following:

- Chapter 1: Krishna Attracts the Gopīs and Disappears
- Chapter 2: The Gopīs Search for Krishna
- Chapter 3: The Gopīs Pray to Krishna
- Chapter 4: Krishna Reappears Before the Gopīs
- Chapter 5: Krishna and the Gopīs Unite in the Rāsa Dance

Subdivisions, herein referred to as "parts," within each of these chapters can also be observed according to the natural shifts which occur in the story, similar to the way a dramatic play shifts with "scenes" within its "acts." These major divisions within the chapters can be generally characterized as four types of text: descriptive or story *narrative*, *theological discourse*, direct *dialogue*, and prayerful or expressive *monologue*. The five chapters, when viewed collectively with their subdivided parts, produce a symmetry of structure: the first and last chapters each contain four divisions, the second and fourth chapters each contain two, and the middle third chapter contains no divisions. (See Table No. 1 below to see the overall "voice" structure of the five chapters, along with their subdivisions.)

**Chapter Subdivisions according to Change of Voice  
in the Five Chapters of the Rāsalilā**

| CHAPTER 1:                    | CHAPTER 2:                    | CHAPTER 3:                   | CHAPTER 4:                   | CHAPTER 5:                    |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Narrative 1</i><br>(1-11)  | <i>Monologue 1</i><br>(1-23)  | <i>Monologue 2</i><br>(1-19) | <i>Narrative 4</i><br>(1-15) | <i>Narrative 5</i><br>(1-21)  |
| <i>Discourse 1</i><br>(12-16) | <i>Narrative 3</i><br>(24-44) |                              | <i>Dialogue 2</i><br>(16-22) | <i>Narrative 6</i><br>(22-25) |
| <i>Dialogue 1</i><br>(17-41)  |                               |                              |                              | <i>Discourse 2</i><br>(26-36) |
| <i>Narrative 2</i><br>(42-48) |                               |                              |                              | <i>Narrative 7</i><br>(37-39) |

**Table 1.**

Within these major “parts” of the Rāsalilā chapters, further subdivisions can be observed according to specificity of “voice” in narrative description or theological discourse, or the voice of the hero or heroines. These latter divisions of greater detail will be presented below when reviewing the Rāsalilā chapters individually. What is important to point out here is the complexity of the Rāsalilā text; the way didactic discourse is woven into the story line in statements made through narrative or direct speech.

The smallest literary unit of the Rāsalilā is the poetic verse stanza. As with most of the *Bhāgavata* text, the Rāsalilā is written in Sanskrit poetry. It is written in the two-line, four quarter verse which appears throughout the text in five different types of meters, according to the number of syllables in each quarter verse. Further variation within the categories of syllable number occurs according to the various combinations of light and heavy syllables, within each type of quarter verse. The variation in verse meter and pattern is hardly random. Variation in poetic meter infuses the story with a great deal of intensity, emotion and drama, and contributes to the movement of the story line.

## 6. Narrative Shell and Dramatic Story of the Rāsalilā

What follows is an analytical outline of the five-chapter episode of the Rāsalilā. In order to reveal the various portraits of the Gopīs in this episode, it is necessary to trace the development of the story line along with subtle but significant literary devices, such as change in poetic meter.

### Chapter One:

"Krishna Attracts the Gopīs and Suddenly Disappears" is the title I have given to the first chapter of the Rāsalilā. This chapter, comprising a total of forty-eight verses, is the longest chapter of the Rāsalilā and has essentially four parts with further subdivisions:

#### CHAPTER 1: Krishna Attracts the Gopī and Suddenly Disappears

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Part I   | <i>Narrative:</i><br><i>Description of essential elements for the Rāsalilā episode</i> |
| 1 - 3    | Description: Autumn and the beautiful Vrindaban Forest                                 |
| 3        | Description: Krishna's flute music   |
| 4 - 11   | Description: Gopīs attracted by flute and abandoning home                              |
| Part II  | <i>Theological Discourse:</i><br><i>On the spiritual status of the Gopīs</i>           |
| 12       | Parīkṣit's inquiry: How did Gopīs become liberated souls?                              |
| 13 - 16  | Śuka's response: All emotions directed to Krishna, the source of all.                  |
| Part III | <i>Dialogue:</i><br><i>Krishna and the Gopīs</i>                                       |
| 17       | Description: Krishna-Gopīs conversation  |
| 18 - 27  | Krishna speaks to Gopīs questioning purpose of their arrival                           |
| 28 - 30  | Description: Krishna-Gopīs conversation  |
| 31 - 41  | Gopīs speak to Krishna begging him to allow them to stay with him                      |
| Part IV  | <i>Narrative:</i><br><i>Gopīs and Krishna play and Krishna leaves the Gopīs</i>        |
| 42 - 47  | Description: the loving playfulness of the Gopīs with Krishna                          |
| 48       | Description: Krishna suddenly disappears from the Gopīs                                |

Part I (verses 1 through 11) is a descriptive narrative of Śuka which opens up the Rāsalilā episode with an introduction to his own narrative voice and the hero, along with the mystical power that creates the natural setting and the heroines. In this initial part of the first chapter of the Rāsalilā, the hero and heroines are inspired and prepare to meet. The hero is enticed by the night-blooming autumn flowers to enjoy amorously, and the heroines are enticed by the hero's enchanting flute music which causes them to abandon everything.

The author of the *Bhāgavata* wastes no time in introducing four essential elements of its theistic mysticism of "intimacy" in the Rāsalilā, in the beginning of the first chapter of the text:

- (1) The intimate deity
- (2) The scenery for intimacy
- (3) The potency for intimacy
- (4) The intimate devotee

The intimate deity is Krishna or Bhagavān. The scenery for intimacy is the autumn night with the rising full moon and the Vraja forest filled with beautiful blossoming night-blooming flowers situated near the river Yamunā. The potency for intimacy is *yoga-māyā*, which is the mystical potency that accomplishes the impossible in order to make intimate encounters with the supreme deity possible. The intimate devotee is represented by the Gopis themselves, who are first introduced in the third verse of the episode. The first three of these four essential elements of divine intimacy are introduced in the first verse of the first chapter of the Rāsalilā Pañcādhyāya:

Even Bhagavān, after seeing the jasmine flowers  
 blooming during those autumn nights,  
 made up his mind to enjoy himself,  
 and thus he resorted fully to *yoga-māyā*.  
 (RLP 1.1)

As a result of resorting fully to *yoga-māyā*, Krishna is moved or seduced by the love-inspiring natural beauty of the scenery which, in turn, will inspire him, in the next few verses, to produce beautiful flute music, irresistably attracting his divine consorts. The first three elements of intimacy are introduced in this first verse. Along with the fourth element, they are the following:

- (1) Krishna: the Lord as divine Lover, presented here as Bhagavān;
- (2) Vraja: the love-inspiring natural scenery of the rising full moon, reddened evening sky, forest and night-blooming flowers;
- (3) Yogamāyā: the uniting power of intimate love; and
- (4) The Gopīs: the beloved consorts of the divine, who are introduced in the third verse, presented as “those ladies with beautiful eyes.”

The sage Śuka introduces the hero in this first verse as “Bhagavān,” an epithetical name for the supreme Lord, who becomes influenced, during the nights of the autumn season, by the beauty of certain forest flowers with nocturnal blossoms, to enjoy love. Because Bhagavān had resorted to *yoga-māyā*, a special energy that arranges for God’s intimate relationships with his dearest devotees, he is carried away by the beauty of the Vraja sky and forest. This first verse is in the Sanskrit poetic meter of *anuṣṭubh*, a meter containing the smallest number of syllable lengths, typically used in Śuka’s narrations. However, in the next three verses, the longer and elaborate 12-syllable (*jagatī*) meter is employed by the narrator to express the drama of the setting. It is described in verses two and three by the narrator how Bhagavān, amidst the light of the full autumn moon which was coloring the sky and forest with a passionate red, began to produce irresistibly charming music by playing his flute:

Just then the royal moon arose,  
 spreading with its comforting hands  
 its reddish rays over the face of the eastern horizon,  
 dispelling the unhappiness of all those who watched,  
 like a lover who sees his beloved after a long time.  
 (RLP 1.2)

Seeing the lotus flowers bloom  
 and the perfect roundness of the moon,  
 whose light is like the face of Ramā  
 and reddish like fresh *kunkuma*,  
 and seeing the forest colored  
 by the moon’s gentle rays,  
 he began to make sweet music  
 that would capture the hearts  
 of those ladies with beautiful eyes.  
 (RLP 1.3)



By the end of the third verse, the reader is introduced for the first time to the heroines, "the ladies with beautiful eyes," who are later referred to as the Gopīs. In the fourth verse, the heroines, enchanted by the flute music produced by Krishna, are so irresistably attracted to him that they run off to be with him:

After hearing that sweet music  
     which was increasing their passion,  
 the minds of those ladies of Vraja  
     were captured by Krishna.  
 Unaware of one another,  
     with their earrings swinging wildly,  
 they went off to the place  
     where their lover was waiting.  
 (RLP 1.4)

By the fourth verse, the drama of the Rāsailā passage swings into full motion. The remaining six verses of this part describe how the Gopīs dropped everything in their lives to run off to their lover. Indeed, some of their relatives attempt to stop them, but it was too late:

Although their husbands, fathers, brothers  
     and relatives tried to stop them,  
 they whose minds were stunned did not turn back  
     because their very selves had already been stolen by Govinda.  
 (RLP 1.8)

Part II (verses 12 through 16) is theological discourse between the narrator and his listener. King Parikṣit makes an inquiry about the heroines and the narrator responds. The king desires to understand how it was possible for the heroines, who knew the hero only as a lover and not in his majestic position as the supreme being, to become liberated souls:

The revered [king] Parikṣit spoke:  
 They knew Krishna as their only desirable lover;  
     however, they did not know him as the Brahman.  
 O sage, how did the flow of [worldly] qualities cease  
     in those whose minds were influenced by such qualities?  
 (RLP 1.12)

Śuka's response is that the liberation of the heroines was made possible by virtue of dedicating all of their emotions of love toward the hero:

Desire, anger, fear, affection, feelings of oneness,  
and certainly feelings of intimacy,  
should always be directed toward Hari.

For such persons are elevated  
to a state of being utterly filled by God.

(RLP 1.15)

Part III (verses 17 through 41) is a simple dialogue between hero and heroines. The narrator introduces the dialogue in verse 17, and in the following ten verses in the *anuṣṭubh* meter, beginning with verse 18, the hero speaks to the heroines in a courteous but playful and teasing fashion. Krishna asks the Gopis why they have come, explains that it is not fitting for them to be with him—especially at night in such a dangerous forest—and urges them to return safely to their duties at home. The narrator bridges over from Krishna's last words to the Gopis' response in the next three verses (verses 28 through 30). The first verse in *anuṣṭubh* meter informs the reader of the Gopis' sadness, and the two verses following describe their reactions and the effects of Krishna's rejecting words, with elaborate and rich descriptive language in the *śakvārī* meter (fourteen syllables per quarter verse), anticipating the emotional response of the Gopis. The Gopis then supply all kinds of reasons to Krishna about why it is that they should stay and how it is that they cannot return:

O [supreme] soul, indeed the spiritually advanced  
feel an attraction to you as their own eternal beloved.

With these husbands, children, and the others  
who cause us so much trouble,  
what is to be done?

O supreme Lord,  
please be merciful unto us.

O lotus-eyed one,  
please do not destroy our hopes for you  
that we have had for such a long time.

(RLP 1.33)

Our minds were easily stolen by you  
 from our homes,  
 so also our hands which were absorbed  
 in household work.

Our feet will not move a step  
 from the soles of your feet.

How shall we return to Vraja?

And then what would we do?

(RLP 1.34)

After eleven verses of response in the *śakvārī* meter by the Gopīs, Part IV (verses 42 through 48) of the first chapter, a descriptive narrative of Krishna and the Gopīs' affectionate play, and Krishna's sudden departure begins. After Krishna hears the passionate pleas of the Gopīs, he acquiesces and engages in loving and playful activities with them. Krishna and the Gopīs play affectionately and sing together through the forest and down on the river banks. The Gopīs become prideful, however, causing Krishna to leave them:

Thus those who had obtained the honor  
 of Bhagavān, Krishna, the great soul,  
 due to their pridefulness, thought themselves  
 to be the best among all women in the world.

(RLP 1.47)

Keśava could see their pride  
 and how they became conceited  
 with their good fortune.

In order to calm their pride  
 and to bestow upon them his grace,  
 right there [in front of them]  
 he suddenly disappeared.

(RLP 1.48)

The chapter ends on this note of the sudden disappearance of Krishna. The episode of the Rāsalīlā is now prepared to portray the Gopīs in their separation from Krishna and, later, in their re-uniting with him.

## Chapter Two

"The Gopīs Search for Krishna" is the title I have given to the second chapter of the

*rāsahitā*. Totalling 44 verses, this chapter consists of essentially two parts. Part I is a monologue of the heroines, and Part II, a narrative of the Gopīs finding Krishna's favorite (but rejected) Gopī.

## CHAPTER 2: The Gopīs Search for Krishna

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Part I      | <i>Monologue:</i><br><i>Gopīs express their feelings of separation in their search</i> |
| 1 - 4       | Description: Gopīs imitate Krishna out of sense of losing him                          |
| 5 - 13      | Gopīs talk to creatures and plants and search endlessly for him                        |
| 14 - 23     | Description: Gopīs imitating Krishna and others in his <i>līlās</i>                    |
| Part II     | <i>Narrative:</i><br><i>Gopīs find favored Gopī rejected</i>                           |
| 24, 26      | Description: Gopīs detect footprints and activities of Krishna                         |
| 25, 27 - 33 | Gopīs confer with one another about Krishna and special Gopī                           |
| 34 - 39     | Description: Krishna rejects special Gopī and vanishes from her                        |
| 40 - 44     | Gopīs find special Gopī deserted in forest and she tells story to them                 |

Part I (verses 1 through 23), which I refer to as a section of monologue, can be further broken down into three sub-sections. In each of these sub-sections, the Gopīs are acting and talking in relation to Krishna without a response or reciprocation from anyone or anything, and thus a broad use of the word monologue is engaged to describe this part of the chapter. The first subsection is a description, by the narrator, of the Gopīs imitating Krishna's behavior and mannerisms out of a sense of loss (verses 1 through 4):

By his movements, affectionate smiles and passionate glances,  
by his attractive speaking and the passion of his playfulness,  
their hearts were captivated.

Each one of those women then began to imitate  
the different actions of the Lord of Ramā.

Their very selves were fully absorbed in him.

(RLP 2.2)

The second section (verses 5 through 13), consists of the Gopīs talking to forest plants and even the earth, while endlessly searching for Krishna:

Let us inquire from these creepers,  
 even though they are embraced by the arms  
 of the lords of the forest [the trees].  
 Certainly they must have been touched by his fingernails.  
 Just see how they are experiencing ecstasy  
 [throughout their bodies]!  
 (RLP 2.13)

And the third section (verses 14 through 23) is a description of the Gopīs imitating Krishna and those who interact with him in his various *līlās*:

[Śuka spoke:]  
 The Gopīs were going mad from their search for Krishna  
 and thus they spoke these words of madness.  
 Indeed, they began to act out the *līlā* of Bhagavān  
 because their very selves were fully absorbed in him.  
 (RLP 2.14)

One of them imitated Pūtanā and another  
 imitated Krishna who drank from her breast.  
 Another acted like an infant crying and with her foot  
 kicked one [Gopī] who was pretending to be a cart.  
 (RLP 2.15)

Part II of the second chapter (verses 24 through 44) is a narrative of the event of the Gopīs finding Krishna's favorite Gopī rejected and deserted in the forest. Many of these verses (from 24 through 41) are devoted to the detection of Krishna's footprints in the forest, along with a second set of footprints, and finally finding that special, deserted Gopī. First is a brief narrative description of the Gopīs detecting the footprints and surmising from these footprints the activities of Krishna (verses 24 and 26). Then the Gopīs confer with one another to complete the detection work about Krishna and the special Gopī (verses 25, 27-33). This special Gopī is described by the other Gopīs in these verses, although her name is left unspoken. However, the teachers of the Caitanya school find special significance in the Gopīs' description of her in the following specific verse:

Indeed, she worshipped Bhagavān perfectly (*anayārādhitah*),  
 who is Hari, the supreme Lord.  
 Abandoning us, and being so pleased [by her],  
 Govinda must have led her to a secret place.  
 (RLP 2.28)

The teachers of the Caitanya school identify this special Gopī as Krishna's dearest beloved consort, the supreme Goddess Rādhā, who is recognized as the one Gopī who "worships Krishna perfectly" (*anayārādhitah*). None of the personal names of any of the Gopīs are explicitly or implicitly given in the *Bhāgavata*, although they are mentioned in other *purāṇas*. However, this specific verse becomes important in revealing this special Gopī's personal name in a partially disguised form of the participle *anayārādhitah*, which appears in the first *pāda*, in which the first four consecutive letters, out of five letters, of the name of Rādhā are embedded.

The narrator describes how Krishna rejects the special Gopī and how he suddenly vanishes from her as well (verses 34-39). The narrator then quotes her words of devastation, epitomizing the feelings of separation felt by all of the Gopīs:

[The Gopī spoke:]

O Lord, my darling beloved, where are you?

O mighty armed one, where are you?

O friend, for me, your poor maidservant,  
please reveal your presence!

(RLP 2.39)

In the last five verses of the chapter (RLP 2.40-44), the Gopīs find the special Gopī deserted in the forest, and she tells her story to all of the Gopīs. In the penultimate verse, the narrator explains the ways in which the Gopīs were "selflessly" absorbed in thoughts of Krishna, due to their separation from Krishna:

Their minds were centered upon him,

they were talking about him,

imitating him,

their very selves absorbed in him.

Indeed, while singing about his qualities,

they forgot their homes

and they forgot themselves.

(RLP 2.43)

The search for Krishna builds their absorption in thoughts of him, and the Gopīs' emotions of separation intensify when they find the special Gopī alone in the forest, suffering. As the forest grows dark, this chapter concludes with all of the Gopīs turning back to the river Yamunā.

### Chapter Three

I have titled the third chapter of the Rāsalilā, “The Gopīs Pray to Krishna.” This chapter is a prayerful monologue and has no subdivisions.

#### CHAPTER 3: The Gopīs Pray to Krishna

##### *Monologue:*

*The various expressed thoughts and feelings of the Gopīs after giving up their search for Krishna during the period of Krishna’s absence*

1 - 19

Praising the divine and personal qualities of Krishna  
 Remembering the divine and personal qualities of Krishna  
 Entreating Krishna to appear again before them  
 Proclaiming their love for and dedication to Krishna  
 Expressing their emotions of pain, anger and bewilderment

Chapter Three is the smallest chapter of the five, comprising only nineteen verses, with a very different pattern of metered verses. Every other chapter of the Rāsalilā, and most chapters throughout the *Bhāgavata*, is predominantly utilizing the common epic *anuṣṭubh* eight-syllable quarter-verse stanza throughout. Not one such *anuṣṭubh* verse exists in this chapter. In the other Rāsalilā chapters, the *anuṣṭubh* verses outnumber by far the verses in other meter lengths. The *least* number of actual *anuṣṭubh* verses in the other four chapters of the Rāsalilā which contain them is 16 out of a total of 22 verses (in Chapter 4).<sup>26</sup> The significance of a chapter with no verses in the very common and dominant *anuṣṭubh* meter is the intensity of expression throughout the whole of this chapter. In this chapter, which is tantamount to a climactic plateau for the whole episode, the Gopīs express their various thoughts and feelings after giving up their search for Krishna, as they experience Krishna’s absence very intensely. All the verses in this chapter are in the eleven-syllable quarter-verse meter known as *triṣṭubh*, with the exception of the last verse, which reaches an increased climactic pitch, extending the verse length to the even longer *śakvārī* (14-syllable quarter-verse meter).

Many of the verses express the strong emotions of the Gopīs:

O bestower of all benedictions,  
 because we are remembering your glances,  
 which surpass the beauty of the very center  
 of the most exquisitely pure lotus flower blossom  
 in a serene pond during the autumn season,  
 it is killing us.

O Lord of love,  
we ask you,  
as your undemanding maidservants,  
in this world  
is this not murder?

(RLP 3.2)

Other verses express their attraction to the beauty of Krishna:

During the day when you go off to the forest  
we cannot see you.

The smallest fraction of a moment  
seems like thousands of years.

And when we are able to see your beautiful face,  
with locks of curling hair,  
it seems to us that the creator was senseless  
when making eyelids that can cover our eyes!

(RLP 3.15)

There are some verses that acknowledge Krishna's greatness in his divinity and various divine activities that he has performed:

Certainly you are not the son of a Gopī.

You are the witness  
within the inner heart of all embodied beings.

When Vikhanas prayed to you

for the protection of the universe,

O friend, you arose in the dynasty of the Sātvatas.

(RLP 3.4)

In the last verse of the chapter, the Gopīs express their care for Krishna along with their passionate desires, and pledge their lives to him:

We wonder if your very fine lotus feet  
are not hurt by small stones  
and other harsh objects  
as you roam the forest.

O beloved, thus we are afraid to place your lotus feet  
gently on our breasts,  
for fear that they also might be too rough.

Our lives belong only to you.

(RLP 3.19)



## Chapter Four

The fourth chapter of the Rāsālilā I have titled, "Krishna Reappears Before the Gopīs." This chapter is divided into two parts: the first part is a narrative and the second part, a simple dialogue.

### CHAPTER 4: Krishna Reappears Before the Gopīs

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Part I  | <i>Narrative:</i><br><i>Krishna and the Gopīs meet again</i>                      |
| 1 - 2   | Description: Krishna reappears before the loving Gopīs                            |
| 3 - 15  | Description: Gopīs reactions to Krishna's reappearance                            |
| Part II | <i>Dialogue:</i><br><i>Gopīs try to understand Krishna's separation from them</i> |
| 16      | Gopīs address a question to Krishna about the nature of love                      |
| 17 - 22 | Krishna affectionately answers question of Gopīs                                  |

Part I (verses 1 through 15) begins by the narrator's description of the Gopīs crying out for Krishna to reappear. By the second verse, the reappearance of Krishna is described, and the third verse describes the Gopīs' varied emotional reactions and responses to his appearance. One Gopī shows affection in her eyes, others are physically affectionate, another exhibits loving anger, and another goes into a deep meditation:

One of them took him into her heart  
 through the aperture of her eyes,  
 and then she closed her eyes  
 and kept embracing him from within.  
 She experienced ecstasy [throughout her body]  
 like a *yogī* who becomes overwhelmed by bliss.  
 (RLP 4.8)

Then Krishna and the Gopīs communed with the moonlit night by going down to the banks of the river:

Having taken them to the [river] Kālindi,  
 the Almighty  
 then entered  
 the banks of the river,

where a light breeze carried the fragrance  
 of blooming jasmine flowers  
 and celestial coral trees,  
 attracting many bees.  
 (RLP 4.11)

There the darkness of the night was dispelled  
 by the abundance of the rays of the autumn moon,  
 and the auspiciousness of the Kṛṣṇā (Yamunā River) was in her soft sands,  
 gathered by her water's rippling hands.  
 (RLP 4.12)

This part is comprised of the typical *anuṣṭubh* meter of narrative verses until verses 13-15, when the meter becomes the 12-syllable quarter verse known as *jagatī*, supporting the building passion of Krishna and the Gopīs.

Part II (verses 16 through 22) returns to the *anuṣṭubh*-metered verses and begins with a one-verse question of the Gopīs, directed toward Krishna on the nature of loving relationships:

The beautiful Gopīs spoke:  
 Some love those who love [in return],  
     while others love in a way different from this  
     [by loving those who may not love in return],  
 and others love in neither of these ways.  
     O dear one, please explain these clearly to us.  
 (RLP 4.16)

Krishna responds first with didactic verses (17 through 19) of *anuṣṭubh* meter on the nature of relationships. Then in verses 20 and 21, both of which jump to the *triṣṭubh* meter, Krishna provides personal, more emotional responses to the Gopīs about the nature of his love for them. Finally, the last verse increases meter length to *jagatī* when Krishna expresses his appreciation for the Gopīs' love for him:

I am unable to adequately reciprocate  
     your own pure [love]  
     in your faultless relationship (with me),  
     even over the long lifetime of heavenly beings.  
 You who have been loving toward me  
     have cut the strong ties to home  
     that are so difficult to overcome.  
     May you be rewarded by the purity [of your own love].  
 (RLP 4.22)

## Chapter Five

In the fifth and final chapter of the *rāsalilā*, which I have titled, "The Gopīs Unite with Krishna in the Rāsa Dance," the finale and climax of the episode occur. This chapter can be subdivided into four distinct parts.

### CHAPTER 5: Krishna Joins the Gopīs in the Rāsa Dance

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Part I   | <i>Narrative:</i><br><i>The Rāsalilā dance</i>  |
| 1 - 3    | Description: formation of the Rāsalilā  |
| 4 - 21   | Description: the Rāsalilā dance itself  |
| Part II  | <i>Narrative:</i><br><i>The Gopīs and Krishna in loving play</i>                                |
| 22 - 25  | Description: the playful and loving activities after Rāsalilā                                   |
| Part III | <i>Theological Discourse</i><br><i>On the nature of Krishna's participation in the Rāsalilā</i> |
| 26 - 28  | Parīkṣit inquiry: the meaning of Rāsalilā and moral conduct                                     |
| 29 - 36  | Śuka response: meaning of Rāsalilā discussed  |
| Part IV  | <i>Narrative:</i><br><i>The conclusion of the Rāsa-lilā episode</i>                             |
| 37 - 39  | Description: Krishna and Gopīs lovingly part  |

Part I (verses 1 through 21) is the narrative description of both the formation of and the actual dancing and singing in the dance of the *rāsa*.

The festival of the *rāsa* dance began  
 as a beautifully decorated circle of Gopīs  
 with Krishna, the supreme Lord of mystical energy (*yogeśvara*),  
 entering into the middle of each pair of Gopīs,  
 with his arm around the necks of the Gopīs,  
 each thinking that she alone was at his side.

Then the sky became crowded  
 with hundreds of celestial planes  
 filled with the inhabitants of the heavenly spheres,  
 along with their wives whose very selves were carried away.  
 (RLP 5.3)

The climax of the whole Rāsailā episode can be observed in the story line in verse 7 when the action and movement of the *rāsa* dance itself reaches a dramatic pitch. The intensity of this climax is further catalyzed by the change in poetic meter to the *atyasṭi* (17 syllables per quarter verse), the longest poetic meter utilized in all five chapters, found only in this one verse:

With their feet stepping to the dance,  
 the gestures of their hands along with loving smiles,  
 the playful movements of their eyebrows and bending waists,  
 with the clothes covering their breasts moving rhythmically  
 and earrings swinging back and forth on their cheeks,  
 the spiritual wives of Krishna,  
 whose braids and belts were tied tightly,  
 their faces perspiring,  
 were singing his praises,  
 and they appeared like lustrous flashes of glowing lightning  
 engulfed by a ring of dark clouds.  
 (RLP 5.7)

Part II (verses 22 through 25) continues the narrative of Krishna and the Gopīs in the passion of their loving play after the *rāsa* dance, in both *jagatī* and *śakvaṇī* meters. In the 25th verse, narrative and theological explanation is provided by the narrator:

Although he was with that group of women  
 who were so deeply attached to him,  
 he was never interrupted by worldly sexual desire,  
 since he was pure and fulfilled in all desires within himself.  
 Thus he allowed himself to be subdued by all of those beautiful nights,  
 made so brilliant by the rays of the moon,  
 which are the very source of all poetic narrations of *rasa*  
 inspired by autumn.  
 (RLP 5.25)

Part III (verses 26 through 36) is the theological discourse of Śuka in response to the king's question about the amorality of Krishna's activities in the Rāsālīlā episode. The narrator explains that Krishna, who is the originator of morality, is not necessarily obligated to follow the moral principles that he created for humans:

Then, for the supreme Lord, what influence could possibly arise  
from the piety or impiety of created living beings,  
whether they be animals, human beings or inhabitants of heaven,  
who are themselves controlled by him?

Ones whose bondage to this world is completely shaken off  
by the power of *yoga*,  
are completely satisfied by service  
in the dust of the lotus feet of the Lord.

Such sages act freely without becoming materially bound.  
How much bondage could there possibly be for the supreme Lord,  
who acts freely, accepting various revealed forms  
according to his own supreme desire?  
(RLP 5.33-34)

For Śuka, there is no question of amorality for Krishna, since the Lord always has a true purpose for all of his actions, whether they may appear moral or amoral. The matter of Krishna's "morality" in relation to Rāsālīlā has been a matter of debate, both inside and outside the tradition, for centuries, even up to the present.

Śuka next explains to the king that Krishna comes to this world out of his grace, so that humans can love and dedicate themselves to him:

Due to his grace, he reveals his human-like form  
for those who are devoted [to him].  
Upon hearing about such play,  
one worships and becomes fully dedicated to him.  
(RLP 5.36)

Part IV (verses 37 through 39) describes how Krishna and the Gopis lovingly part:

At the end of one night for the creator, Brahmā,  
being filled with joy from being with Vāsudeva,  
the Gopīs, the beloved ones of Bhagavān,  
reluctantly returned to their homes.  
(RLP 5.38)

And, finally, the narrator's words conclude the episode by proclaiming that the Rāsalilā is capable of purifying the human heart of all selfishness or lustfulness—merely by hearing its recitation:

One who is filled with faith,  
 who hears or describes  
 the play of Viṣṇu  
 with the young ladies of Vraja,  
 is a self-realized soul upon whom  
 the highest devotion unto Bhagavān is bestowed  
 and from whom lustfulness,  
 which is the disease of the heart,  
 is quickly removed without delay.  
 (RLP 5.39)

The sage Śuka significantly points out that upon hearing the Rāsalilā with faith, one achieves not just liberation from bondage in *saṁsāra* or other material or spiritual benedictions, as one finds at the end of many of the *Bhāgavata* episodes. Moreover, it is not only *bhakti* that is bestowed upon the faithful listener of the Rāsalilā. It is, rather, *bhaktiṁ parām*, or the highest attainable state of devotion, that is achievable. It is important to note that this declaration and benediction of the highest devotion is found only at the end of the Rāsalilā passage.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is another indication of the special place held by the Rāsalilā in the *Bhāgavata*.

### Concluding Observations and Remarks

Based upon the above brief analytical sketch of the Rāsalilā and description of the Gopī passages surrounding it, I would like to suggest the following points: It appears that the author of the *Bhāgavata* intends the Rāsalilā to stand out among all other *līlās*, as the teachers of the Caitanya school claim. Indications of this are several, extrinsic as well as intrinsic to the passage. The Gopī passages prior to the Rāsalilā either point to, anticipate, or prepare the reader for the Rāsalilā event, and the Gopī passages following the Rāsalilā reminisce about or recall, explain, interpret, clarify, or praise the Rāsalilā and the Gopīs, thus providing an elaborate literary "frame," as it were, around the episode. The sheer balance and unity of a developed dramatic story line within a text that spans over five contiguous chapters creates a powerful literary presence within the tenth book, and even through-

out the whole of the *Bhāgavata* text. Furthermore, the number of verses comprising the Rāsalilā passage, and, in addition, the number of chapters and verses of the surrounding Gopī passages which frame the episode, clearly indicate its incomparable weight and therefore special status.

Also, as briefly mentioned, two special phrases are found in the beginning and ending verses of the Rāsalilā Pañcādhyaṃya by which the author of the *Bhāgavata* indicates the special status of the episode. It was briefly presented above that the phrase *yoga-māyā* in the first verse of the Rāsalilā is uniquely applied to Krishna, rather than to his created subjects, and is indeed different from all of the hundreds of other instances in which the phrase *yoga-māyā* (or just the word *māyā*) appears, thus proving to be a subtle but powerful indication that this passage is exceptional in the eyes of its author. Moreover, it was also mentioned that the phrase *bhaktim parām* is used in the very last benedictive verse, the only verse of its kind to claim that one attains the "highest devotion" to God when hearing or reciting this episode. The special uses of these key phrases are important clues of the unique status of the Rāsalilā within the *Bhāgavata*.

At the risk of stating the obvious I should also like to point out that the Rāsalilā is intrinsically a love story. The above review will reveal that the Rāsalilā story itself contains many of the elements and traits of good Sanskrit drama. However, the Vaishnavas for whom this episode is the genuine and veritable revelation of the highest devotion for God, exemplified in the behavior and emotions of the Gopīs, the Rāsalilā is certainly no ordinary love story. The Rāsalilā is distinguished by the participants involved: God and the soul are understood as the lovers in this *divine* love story. And it is only by reading with faith this particular divine love story among all of the other episodes within the *Bhāgavata*, that humans can overcome worldly lustfulness (*kāman*), which is the fundamental disease of the human heart (*hṛd-rogam*).

### Appendix: On the Challenges of Interpreting the Rāsalilā

Among the few classical love stories of the world cherished as truly *divine* love stories, the Rāsalilā stands out as the most explicitly theological in its expression of divinity. Only a few traditions emerge from the history of world religions that present a love story that represents or expresses the very intimate side of God, the intensely passionate worship of the devotee, and the superlatively divine love experienced between them expressed in

amorous emotion. The few traditions that communicate this saga of love were transformed by special texts that presented the archetypal love story, and which functioned as the very source or basis of these traditions of theistic mysticism. For certain sects of Jewish and Catholic mysticism the *Song of Solomon* of the Old Testament became the original source of the divine love story. Certain Sufi traditions found in the poetic love story of *Layla and Majnun* of Nizami a metaphor of divine love. And so for several of the Vaishnava traditions of India, the Rāsalilā of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* became the archetypal divine love story, verily a revelation of divine love, from which thinkers in these traditions drew constantly. These texts themselves became the original classical sources of divine passionate love for God for their respective traditions, i.e., the original love stories for these religious cultures. For the Vaishnavas, moreover, the divine love story of the Rāsalilā is not merely metaphorical, but is most essentially and metaphysically real. The forms, emotions, and actions described within the Rāsalilā are not of this world. Rather, they are *eternally* real, existing as the innermost aspects of the life of God and constitutes the highest, and yet easily accessible, revelation of divinity.

While there is no doubt that the portrayal of the Gopīs in the Rāsalilā has had a profound influence on the religion and culture of India, the passage poses challenges. Scholars on the traditions of Krishna-*bhakti* commonly acknowledge the impact that the Rāsalilā has had on later forms of Krishna-Gopī and Rādhā-Krishna devotion and expression. However, the meaning of the Rāsalilā has puzzled its readers for centuries. Even the narrator sage Śuka within the *Bhāgavata* is questioned about the moral character of God by its chief listener, the king.

Understanding the amorous imagery presented by any tradition of divine intimacy poses challenges. The divine intimacy of the Rāsalilā and other amorous imagery within the Vaishnava tradition have continued to be a source of perplexity for those outside of the tradition in the East and in the West as well. Challenges in the interpretation of the Rāsalilā are frankly understandable and reasonable. How can such a morally strict orthodox tradition as the Caitanya Vaishnavas accept as the most sacred portions of its scriptures a vision of God with his divine consort that can appear to be the amorous, or "erotic," and even the apparently adulterous interactions between two lovers of this world? Indeed, this question is asked (by the king), as has been reviewed above, toward the end of the Rāsalilā text itself. Thus, this question of the meaning of amorous imagery is not a new one, nor is it



unimportant for the tradition, as well as for those outside the tradition attempting to interpret it.

A.K. Majumdar, a renowned scholar of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, acknowledges the difficulty of interpreting the divine imagery of *bhakti* intimism connected with Krishna and the Gopīs. Majumdar states that, "The most well-known episode of the Bh.P. is the Rāsa-līlā described in the tenth canto. It is also the most misunderstood episode."<sup>28</sup> Scholars and readers of the Rāsalīlā have proven at times to be confounded and bewildered about the true inner meaning of the text. Thus, up to the present, a wide range of interpretations and evaluations of the amorous imagery of intimism has existed among Indian and western scholars. Some have interpreted this amorous imagery as allegory or metaphor, intentionally or unintentionally ignoring dimensions of its literal content which are so important to the tradition.

An example of this simplistic interpretation is Geoffrey Parrinder's claim that Sufi and Christian forms of divine intimism, along with the Vaiṣṇava form, are effectively allegorical. Parrinder makes the sweeping statement that the Vaiṣṇava presentation "employs an erotic metaphor to explain the relation of humans to God and to encourage *bhakti*, in the manner of the Sufi mystics and the biblical Song of Songs."<sup>29</sup> While Parrinder implicitly acknowledges that these traditions present forms of divine intimism, he moves far too hastily to interpret all of these traditions allegorically. Although the rich metaphorical aspects of the intimism of Krishna-*bhakti* can be readily recognized, it is hardly the case that it is *merely* metaphor, as he insists. Parrinder's insistence is obvious when he states that "the metaphor remains only a metaphor."<sup>30</sup> To understand the Vaiṣṇava picture of intimacy as metaphor only, as Parrinder suggests, would be utterly incomplete and distorted from the perspective of the tradition, doing a disservice to the deeper understanding of the text.

It would be easy to document how, for many traditions, it is specifically the amorous, or "erotic," elements within various forms of divine intimism that are so troublesome to interpret. Interpretations of *bhakti* intimism specifically as a form of erotic symbolism are commonplace. Some interpretations exaggerate the sensuality of this imagery by taking it very literally as erotic worldly love. Others interpret this use of love imagery as a form of psychological sublimation or transfiguration of the human sexual impulse, while some criticize this love imagery as promoting an emotionally unhealthy, even aberrational aspect of religion. For example, S.K. De, one of the

most accomplished scholars of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in this century, expresses his ambivalence toward the tradition of Krishna-*bhakti* in his oscillation between an appreciation of this school's cultural contributions and what he feels are the emotional dangers that it can present or introduce. De understands what he terms in one part of his work as "ecstatic religious emotion," as also being a "psychological and ethical aberration." De fears, along with others, that psychological and ethical transgressions are contained within the amorous imagery of Vaiṣṇavism:

All this has been severely condemned by some critics as an emasculated ritual of emotional debauchery; but without going so far, it should be admitted that the intimate subtilizing of erotic details, however mystically transfigured, is bound to be characterised as a psychological and ethical aberration rather than as a healthy ennobling religious mood.<sup>31</sup>

It is clear from this statement that De is challenged in the interpretation of theistic intimacy by the apparently quasi-erotic tenor of the texts. He further expresses his skepticism and apprehension when he states that "in the emphasis laid on the erotic sentiment in the sports of Kṛṣṇa, the attitude borders definitely on sense-devotion, and leans perceptibly and dangerously towards erotic passion."<sup>32</sup>

De's concern is understandable in light of the practices in which certain non-Vaiṣṇava sects engage, including sexual rituals that imitate and falsely portray the images of divine intimacy found in the Gauḍīya tradition. They practice rituals of exaggerated sexual reenactments, thus misapplying the images of divine intimacy. The history of the Caitanya sect includes the theologically and ritually unrelated Sahajiyā sects, traditions owing their origin to a form of tantric Buddhism, specifically that of the Vrajrayāna sect, extant in Bengal centuries before the appearance of Caitanya. Some of the practices of certain Sahajiyā sects became quite prominent in the Bengal region and consisted of sexual "reenactments" of Krishna's activities with the Gopīs. Unfortunately, even scholars have mistakenly identified these non-Vaiṣṇava sects with the orthodox school of Caitanya.<sup>33</sup> Although De acknowledges that Caitanya himself "held to an ascetic type of morality and expressed strict views regarding sexual relationship,"<sup>34</sup> he understandably expresses apprehension about the Caitanya school's ideals, considering the distracting presence of the Sahajiyā approach.

At other times, De demonstrates a more positive attitude toward amorous imagery. However, he expresses frustration that he cannot truly interpret

this imagery exclusively as religious symbolism, because it would not be in agreement with the tradition's much more complex understanding. De states the following in this regard:

If this were only a symbol or allegory of the soul's longing for the divine lover, it would be a legitimate use of erotic imagery and erotic impulse in the service of religious symbolism. But the works of the sect make it quite clear that the erotic contemplation is not merely symbolical or figurative but, as we have said, vivid and literal.<sup>35</sup>

De correctly recognizes something of the purpose or the desired effect of this "erotic imagery" when he states that "the utter self-abandonment of the Gopis, the romantic love of the mistress for her lover, becomes the accepted symbol of the soul's longing for God; and the vivid realization of the eternal sports of Kṛṣṇa in an imaginative Vṛndāvana is supposed to lead to a passionate love and devotion to the deity."<sup>36</sup> Thus De represents well the ambivalence and tension in the intellectual realm of the interpretation of this tradition's most treasured revelation of divine love.

Some scholars are more attuned to the intrinsic purpose of this Vaishnava revelation than others, however. Majumdar appreciates the Rāsalilā when he states that it "describes in poetic terms the ultimate state to which love for God can lead His devotee. Arriving at the stage of supreme bliss he sheds all egotism. There is no demand, no expectation, no acceptance: only love ..."<sup>37</sup> Here Majumdar attempts to understand the meaning of the Rāsalilā, which barely touches upon the depth of meaning that the passage has had for the teachers of the Caitanya school.

The meaning of the Rāsalilā and its vision of divine love have challenged scholars of this tradition for centuries, even up to the present day. And yet its meaning continues to invigorate the very heart of the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava tradition, perhaps because the tradition's leading teachers and exemplary mystics have, throughout the centuries, offered esoteric explanations on the mysteries of the *līlā*. It is no wonder, then, that the *Bhāgavata*'s ultimate vision of the Gopīs presented in the Rāsalilā and in its connected passages becomes virtually the very foundation for all later developments of the Krishna-Gopī theme in theological reflection, in the mystical practice of *sādhana-bhakti*, and in dramatic and poetic expressions. The foundational text of the Rāsalilā in Indian religious traditions, and its subject matter which continues to intrigue and perplex persons by its controversial themes to this day, make it one of the truly great and unique love stories of the world.

# ENDNOTES

1. The Caitanya and Vallabha schools, and most probably the Nimbārka school as well, see the Gopīs as the ultimate example of devotion.
2. This famous five chapter episode of the Rāsālīlā is not a name found within the *Bhāgavata* text itself. However, the similar name of “*rāsa-kṛīḍā*” is found in the fifth chapter of the episode.
3. Some editions of the text count 173 verses. It is in the fifth chapter of the Rāsālīlā chapters that one finds variations in verse counts, either 39 or 40 verses.
4. References to verses in the five-chapter episode of the Rāsālīlā located within the *Bhāgavata* text will be indicated more simply and independently of the *Bhāgavata* text. The abbreviation for Rāsālīlā Pañcādhyāya will be RLP and then the Rāsālīlā chapters of the BhP 10.29-33 will be indicated simply by 1-5 respectively, followed by a verse number or numbers.
5. Noel Sheth, S. J., *The Divinity of Krishna* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1984), 53.
6. *ibid.*, 52.
7. *ibid.*, 103.
8. A detailed synoptic comparison of the three versions of the Rāsālīlā episodes from the *Harivaṁśa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* texts would be useful for analyzing further the value of the *Bhāgavata* revelation for the Caitanya school. However, it is not within the scope of the present study to present such an analysis.
9. In modern times, *rāsālīlā* can also refer to the dramatic and musical performances of the many other childhood *līlās* of Krishna that are performed in and outside of India. Within India, these dramatic performances of Krishna’s various *līlās* are performed in two areas, and are called *rās līlā* (Hindi form of *rāsa*) because they open with the *rāsa* dance, acknowledging, indeed as a testimonial, that it is regarded as the ultimate *līlā* of Krishna. In the village of Vrindaban, sacred to the devotees of Krishna as Krishna’s spiritual center on this earthly plane, the *rās līlā* dramatic and musical performances are choreographed with young boys playing the parts of the *gopīs* and Krishna. In the state of Manipur, the dancers are young females playing all the parts. In recent years, the Hare Krishna movement has sponsored a world-wide tour of the Manipuri Dancers in their dance performances of the *līlās* of Krishna.
10. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (CC) II 13.66, 20.284, 21.44. The similar phrase *rāsādika* occurs in the following locations: CC I 4.81, 5.220 and II 13.143.
11. Viśvanātha commentary to BhP 10.29.1.
12. CC III 14.44: *kṛṣṇa-līlā-maṇḍala, śuddha śaṅkha-kuṇḍala, gaḍiyāche śuka kārīkara*.
13. The three places in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* in which the *Bhāgavata* verse 10.47.60 is quoted in full are the following: CC II 8.232 in Rāmānanda Rāya’s talks with Caitanya; CC II 9.121 in Caitanya’s talks with Venkṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭa; and CC III 7.29

in Caitanya's talks with Vallabha Bhaṭṭa.

14. BhP 2.7.33.

15. BhP 3.2.34: *śarac-chaśi-karair mṛṣṭam mānayan rajanī-mukham | gāyan kala-padam reme strīṇām maṇḍala-maṇḍanaḥ ||*

16. *gopinām paramānanda āsīd govinda-darsane | kṣaṇam yuga-śatam iva yāsām yena vinābhavat ||* BhP 10.19.16.

17. A distinction must be made between what might be called the "amorous" Gopīs and those who are "motherly" Gopīs. The passages that are of interest here are of the amorous Gopīs, since it is to the various exemplifications of the *mādhurya-rasa* by the Gopīs that we must go in order to examine the Gauḍīya school's understanding of ultimate love for God. There are many motherly Gopīs and therefore many verses, up to about the nineteenth chapter of the tenth book, in which "the Gopīs," in the episodes of Krishna as a very young child or as an infant, are mentioned. The Gopīs in these episodes are not the amorous Gopīs; rather, they are of the *vātsalya-rasa*, as they experience feelings of caring for and nurturing Krishna as an infant or small child. However, it is specifically the amorous Gopīs located within *mādhurya-rasa* to which I am referring for purposes of this study.

18. *śarad-arkāṁśu-jāms tāpān bhūtānām uḍupō 'harat | dehābhimāna-jam bodho mukundo vraja-yoṣitām ||* BhP 10.20.42.

19. BhP 10.20.45: *āśiṣya sama-śītoṣṇam prasūna-vana-mārutam | janās tāpam jahur gopyo na kṛṣṇa-hṛta-cetasah ||*

20. *iti veṇu-ravam rājan sarva-bhūta-manoharam | śrutvā vraja-strīyaḥ sarvā varṇayantyo bhīrebhire ||* BhP 10.21.6. The object of the verb *abhīrebhire* is ambiguous, perhaps intentionally. Commentators on this verse have stated that the Gopīs either "embraced one another," as is translated above, or that the Gopīs "embraced Krishna [in their hearts]."

21. BhP 10.21.20: *evam-vidhā bhāgavato yā vṛndāvana-cāriṇaḥ | varṇayantyo mītho gopyaḥ kṛdās tan-mayatām yayuḥ ||*

22. I have devoted a chapter in my dissertation (entitled "Selfless Love of God: The Meaning of the Rāsaliḍ Episode in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* for the Caitanya School of Vaishnava Bhakti," forthcoming) to the significance of this use of *māyā* found in the first verse of the Rāsaliḍ episode in comparison to all the other applications of this word throughout the *Bhāgavata* text.

23. *sarvātma-bhāvo 'dhikṛto bhavatīnām adhokṣaje | virāheṇa mahā-bhāgā mahān me 'nugrahaḥ kṛtaḥ ||* BhP 10.47.27. The phrase from this verse, *sarvātma-bhāva*, which I translate here as "love of the whole heart" (also found in verses BhP 9.4.21 and 11.12.15), is the key concept adopted by Vallabha (c.1479-c.1531) for his characterization of the state of being of the Gopīs in his commentary to the Rāsaliḍ chapters, known as the *Subodhinī*.

24. BhP 10.47.34: *yat tv aham bhavatīnām vai dūre varte priyo dṛṣām | manasaḥ san-nikarṣārtham mad-anudhyāna-kāmyayā ||*

25. BhP 10.47.35: *yathā dūra-care preṣṭhe mana āviśya vartate | strīṇām ca na tathā*

etah sannikṛṣṭe kṣi-gocare ||

26. Chapter 2 contains the greatest percentage of *anuṣṭubh* verse as compared with the other types of verse collectively, 37 out of 44 verses, viz., 84%. Chapter 4 contains 73%; Chapter 5 contains 71%; and Chapter 1 contains 62%. The average percentage of *anuṣṭubh* verses combined to all other types of metered verses in the four Rāsaliḥ chapters that contain them is 72%.

27. The phrase *bhaktim parām* is found in three other places throughout the whole of the *Bhāgavata* text (BhP 10.38.2, 11.29.28, and 12.10.6), and none of these instances of the phrase are used as part of a last verse benediction as is found in the case of the Rāsaliḥ.

28. A.K. Majumdar, *Concise History of Ancient India*, Vol. III, *Hinduism: Society, Religion and Philosophy* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1983), p. 591.

29. Geoffrey Parrinder, *World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1985; originally published in 1971), p. 233.

30. *ibid.*

31. S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1986; originally published in 1942 and then again in 1961), pp. 551-2.

32. *ibid.*

33. For example, Victor Turner, in his work, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), blatantly and mistakenly identifies the Caitanya Vaishnava movement with Sahajiyā Tantric tradition (cf. page 157).

34. S.K. De, *op. cit.*, pp. 551-2.

35. *ibid.*

36. *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

37. A.K. Majumdar, *Concise History of Ancient India*, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 591.

## RĀDHĀ, KṚṢṆA, CAITANYA: THE INNER DIALECTIC OF THE DIVINE RELATIVITY

Ravindra Svarūpa dāsa  
(William H. Deadwyler, III)

**T**he Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas are those who worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa according to the example and instructions of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, whom the Gauḍīyas also revere as a divine *avatāra*. In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava understanding, Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya not only descend to earth as *avatāras* to reveal their eternal pastimes (*līlās*) within mundane time and space, but also the three eternally embody or personify ultimate principles of divinity. The personal interrelations and -actions among them constitute the innermost, hidden dynamics of the life of Godhead. The central role that Rādhā plays in establishing and advancing this interior dialectic, a drama of ceaseless divine unfolding, shall be the focus of our inquiry.

The theology of Rādhā, in her dynamic role as the transcendent feminine principle in divinity, is expounded by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī in the fourth chapter of the Ādi-līlā of his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Completed in 1615, this Bengali work was undertaken by Kṛṣṇadāsa at the behest of the circle of Gauḍīyas in Vṛndāvana, headed by the Six Gosvāmīs. It became one of the major canonical biographies of Caitanya Mahāprabhu for the Gauḍīyas, especially notable for its attention to theological issues.<sup>1</sup> The fourth chapter of the Ādi-līlā is dedicated to elucidating the confidential reasons for the descent of Caitanya, in which Rādhā takes a central role.

*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* opens with a stately, formal fanfare of fourteen Sanskrit verses. The fourth of these proclaims the external reason for Caitanya's advent; the fifth and sixth verses, the internal or confidential reason. In exposition, Kṛṣṇadāsa devotes the third chapter of Ādi-līlā to elucidating the fourth verse and the following chapter to the fifth and sixth verse. According to Kṛṣṇadāsa's understanding, the descent of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa at

the end of the previous *yuga* (Dvāpara) and that of Caitanya within this sequent Kali-yuga are intimately linked. This pair of *yuga-avatāras* are out of the ordinary; they alike fulfill not only an ordinary or routine exoteric (*bahir-aṅga*) function or purpose (*hetu*) but an extraordinary, esoteric (*antar-aṅga*) purpose as well (Ādi-līlā 4.6 et seq.). (*Aṅga* means “branch,” “part,” or “portion;” *bahir* means “outer,” *antar* means “inner.”)

It is significant that the words *bahir-aṅga* and *antar-aṅga* are also used in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* to denote, respectively, Kṛṣṇa’s material energy (*māyā-śakti*) and his spiritual energy (*cit-śakti*).<sup>2</sup> As the material potency is called *bahir-aṅga*, similarly the *bahir-aṅga hetu* for the *avatāra* indicates the intention of divinity in regard to the material creation. In this case, both Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya fulfill the function of *yuga-avatāras*, the routine periodic incarnations who propagate the normative religious practice appropriate for the age.

The *cit-śakti*, or spiritual potency, which manifests the eternal transcendent realm, the Kingdom of God, is called *antar-aṅga* or internal, and the *antar-aṅga hetu* of the *avatāra* similarly refers to activities that are not occasioned by some temporal need but rather proceed perpetually in transcendence. The names given these two potencies suggest the different relations Kṛṣṇa has with them. It is a staple of Vaiṣṇava theology that Kṛṣṇa never becomes influenced or affected in any way by the external potency. This doctrine of theology finds its narrative correlative in the observation that Kṛṣṇa never consorts with the external energy, Durgā-devī—for when he does so, he is Śiva, whom *Brahma-saṁhitā* depicts as the concretized penumbra of the world-fecundating glance cast toward Durgā by Mahā-viṣṇu, from a distance.<sup>3</sup>

However impassive Kṛṣṇa may be with regard to his material energy, it is another matter in regard to his spiritual energy. The intimate nature of his relationship with this potency, which allows his becoming influenced or affected, is indicated by the very names given it, such as *antar-aṅga-śakti*, *svarūpa-śakti* (see, e.g., Ādi-līlā 2.101), and *ātma-śakti* (BhP 10.20.31). This energy is Kṛṣṇa’s very self. It allows Kṛṣṇa to be what he is.<sup>4</sup>

Kṛṣṇadāsa explains (Ādi-līlā 4.59-69) that the internal, *svarūpa-śakti* manifests itself in three principle subdivisions corresponding to the well-known triad *sat-cit-ānanda*, eternality, knowledge, and bliss. The *sat* feature is manifest through the *sandhinī-śakti*, by which Kṛṣṇa causes himself and others to be. *Samvit-śakti*, corresponding to the *cit* feature, is the energy by which Kṛṣṇa knows himself and causes others to know him; and *hlādinī-śakti*, corresponding to the *ānanda* feature, is the energy by which Kṛṣṇa feels bliss and



causes others to feel bliss. Rādhārāṇī is the transcendental embodiment of the bliss-producing feature (*hlāḍini-śakti*) of Kṛṣṇa's own, internal, *svarūpa-śakti*.

Kṛṣṇadāsa goes on to say: "The essence of *hlāḍini* is *prema* [pure love of God], the essence of *prema* is *bhāva* [ecstatic emotion], and the further reach of *bhāva* is called *mahābhāva*. The personal form of *mahābhāva* is the Goddess Rādhārāṇī. She is the mine of all great qualities and the crest-jewel of all gorgeous consorts of Kṛṣṇa" (Ādi-līlā 4.68-69).

Thus, it is with Rādhārāṇī that Kṛṣṇa consorts most intimately. Her influence over Kṛṣṇa is paramount, and, as Kṛṣṇadāsa describes, Kṛṣṇa becomes completely controlled by Rādhā's love. Kṛṣṇa is *prema-vaśyaḥ*, controlled by his devotee's love (Madhya-līlā 23.74). Commenting on this quality in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (2.1.15) Rūpa Gosvāmī cites the tears of ecstasy Kṛṣṇa sheds upon being reunited with his old school-mate Sudāmā Vipra (BhP 10.80.19), and Kṛṣṇa's feeling for his mother's fatigue when he relented to let her tie him with rope (BhP 10.9.18).

This aspect of the Supreme Lord is most fully developed in relationship with Rādhā, and it constitutes the essence of his confidential nature.

The theologian Charles Hartshorne (1898-2000) attacks what he calls the "classical conception" of God: a deity who is sheerly absolute and devoid of all relativity, entirely a cause and in no way an effect, always active and in no manner passive, and so on. He argues that this conception is based on the application of the faulty "principle of invidious contrast." Pairs of opposites—absolute-relative, independent-dependent, active-passive, cause-effect, one-many—are set up, one pole is deemed "good" and the other "bad," and God is then attributed with all of the former and none of the latter. But, Hartshorne points out, there are also good ways of being relative, passive, dependent, affected, vulnerable, and so on—we use words such "sensitivity," "openness," "empathy" to express it—and those should also be part of the divine excellence. Sound theology must recognize God as somehow both supreme cause and supreme effect at the same time. To fulfill this requirement, Hartshorne, a practitioner of natural theology, develops a naturalistic model of God as the "cosmic organism."<sup>5</sup> This model shares many features with the idea of the divine "universal form" (*viśva-rūpa*) developed in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (Chapter 11) and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (e.g. Second canto, Chapter 1). However, in the revealed theology of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas, the famous epiphany of the *viśva-rūpa* in the *Gītā*, while dramatic and attention-grabbing, is on the lowest level of revelation. The over-

whelming spectacle of sheer power, dominance, and control is alienating rather than endearing. Moreover, the *viśva-rūpa* contains a particularly frightening apocalyptic feature, the gruesome *kāla-rūpa*. In his commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda expresses the typical Gauḍīya take on the universal form by referring to it as “a godless display of opulences.”<sup>6</sup> It is “godless” because it inspires not love, but fear, terror, and the worship of power only.

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas would agree with Hartshorne’s case that divinity must somehow not only be supremely absolute but also supremely relative.

The Gauḍīyas hold moreover that the world has received, through Caitanya’s grace, a revelation of that supremely vulnerable, receptive, and accessible side of God, which is his most endearing and appealing feature, and which most powerfully evokes pure love of God. This feature is not manifest, however, when God is engaged, as Paramātmā, in relation to his material energies. Rather, it is manifest only when the Lord is engaged exclusively in relations within his internal potency, and, even further, specifically when Kṛṣṇa plays as cowherd in the pasture ground of Vraja, or Vṛndāvana. Although he continues to be the supreme controller (*īśvaraḥ paramaḥ*), only there is he able at the same time to immerse himself in the pleasure derived from being the supremely controlled. The intimacy, sweetness, and fullness of the relationship in Vraja is a major reason for the Gauḍīya’s considering Kṛṣṇa to be the summit and source of all other manifest forms of bhagavān, Godhead in its fully personal feature.

Bhagavān refers to one of the three major features of the Godhead, or absolute truth (*tattva*). Although this absolute truth is *jñānam advayam*, non-dual cognition, it is encountered by those who know it (*tattva-vidaḥ*) in three distinctive aspects, called brahman, paramātmā, and bhagavān. (See *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.2.11.)<sup>7</sup> In Gauḍīya understanding, brahman is the undifferentiated (*nirviśeṣa*) transcendent effulgence encountered by an aspirant who has successfully turned away from the material manifestation but lacks capacity for apprehending spiritual variegatedness (*viśeṣa*). With some development of that capacity, there can be experience of paramātmā, a circumscribed realization of the personal feature of the absolute. Here the Lord is encountered only in so far as he is dealing with the external energy and those souls engaged within it. Paramātmā refers specifically to the three *puruṣa-avatāras*, and they are but expansions (*aṁśa*) of bhagavān. The Lord is realized as bhagavān when he is encountered entirely within the transcendent realm of the internal energy. As bhagavān, the Lord consorts

intimately with his internal energy, either as Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṇṭha with Lakṣmī-devī, or, supremely, as Kṛṣṇa in Vraja with Rādhārāṇī.

The supremacy of Kṛṣṇa among all *viṣṇu-tattva* manifestations of the personality of Godhead is established, according to Jīva Gosvāmī (one of the school's major theologians), by *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.28, which, he argues, is the *paribhāṣā-sūtra*, the thesis statement, of the *Bhāgavata*.<sup>8</sup> This text appears at the conclusion of a list of some twenty-two *viṣṇu-avatāras*. It says that while these *avatāras* are portions (*aṁśa*) or portions of portions (*kalā*) of the Lord (*pūṁsaḥ*), Kṛṣṇa is distinguished among them because he is *bhagavān svayam*, the Supreme Lord himself.<sup>9</sup>

The revelation of Vraja Kṛṣṇa is a disclosure of the private life of the Supreme Lord—confidential, intimate, most exclusive. Like the great rulers and controllers in human society, God in his own realm conducts both a public life and a private life, and there, just as here, entrance into the private circle is the most desirable. In this world one's eminence may grant regular attendance at high public functions and formal occasions of state. Still, one has not truly arrived until he needs no invitation to be part of the private, casual gathering of the great. Thus, Vraja Kṛṣṇa is the highest manifestation of the Lord. The realm of Vraja is something like a rural hideaway, a private retreat buried in the countryside, where the supreme Lord can set aside all the trappings of his greatness and simply disport himself on equal terms with his most intimate associates. Intimacy is inhibited in Vaikuṇṭha, the transcendent abode where the Lord, as four-handed Nārāyaṇa, sits in state, and his majesty and opulence (*aīśvarya*) overpowers his sweetness (*mādhurya*); as Kṛṣṇa in Vraja, the Lord's overwhelming sweetness obscures his opulence.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the one Lord manifests himself in a variety of persona in order to conduct different kinds of relationships with his devotees. By veiling his greatness in Vraja, Kṛṣṇa draws his devotees close to him by causing them to forget the ontological gulf between them. In this way, Kṛṣṇa enables himself to enjoy deeply intimate relationships, through which he becomes known as Yaśodā-nandana, the darling son of Yaśodā; as Rāmānuja, the younger brother of Balarāma; as Rādhā-kānta, the boyfriend of Rādhārāṇī. In these roles, his most exalted manifestation, he becomes subordinate to his own devotees.

Thus, for the Gauḍīyas, Kṛṣṇa is the most comprehensive manifestation of the Lord and the origin of all *viṣṇu-tattva* forms. When Kṛṣṇa himself, who is the "complete Lord" (*pūrṇa bhagavān*), descends, all the other *viṣṇu-avatāras* come together within him (Ādi-līlā 4.10-11).<sup>11</sup> In tandem with this,

Rādhārāṇī, who descends with Kṛṣṇa as his consort, contains within herself all parallel *śakti-tattva* forms. Just as Kṛṣṇa expands to manifest the multitude of Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa forms, similarly, Rādhā expands to produce the complimentary forms of Lakṣmī for the host of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa pairs, each of which reigns over one of the unlimited Vaikuṇṭha-lokas, as well as for specific male-female pairs such as Sītā-Rāma. The other *gopīs* of Vraja and the 16,108 queens in Dvārakā are also Rādhā's expansions. Kṛṣṇadāsa summarizes as follows:

Now please listen to how Lord Kṛṣṇa's consorts help Him taste rasa and how they help in His pastimes. The beloved consorts of Lord Kṛṣṇa are of three kinds: the goddesses of fortune, the queens, and the milkmaids of Vraja, who are the foremost of all. These consorts all proceed from Rādhikā. Just as the fountainhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, is the cause of all incarnations, so Śrī Rādhā is the cause of all these consorts. The goddesses of fortune are partial manifestations of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, and the queens are reflections of Her image. The goddesses of fortune are Her plenary portions . . . . The Vraja-devis have diverse bodily features. They are Her expansions and are the instruments for expanding rasa. Without many consorts, there is not such exultation in rasa. Therefore there are many manifestations of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī to assist in the Lord's pastimes.

—Ādi-līlā 4.73-80<sup>12</sup>

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja uses a striking metaphor to illustrate the relationship between Rādhā and the milkmaids (*gopīs*) of Vraja: Rādhārāṇī is like a vine that twines itself around the tree of Kṛṣṇa. The various *gopīs* are the twigs, leaves, and flowers growing on the vine of Rādhā.<sup>13</sup>

Because of the exalted and confidential nature of Vraja Kṛṣṇa, his descent into the world is rare. He descends only one time in each day of Brahmā to make his Vraja-līlā manifest (Ādi-līlā 3.6)—that is, once every four billion, 320 million solar years. A day of Brahmā consists of 994 actual yuga-cycles.<sup>14</sup> *Viṣṇu-avatāras* routinely appear in each of the four *yugas* that make up a cycle. Among these regular descents are the *yuga-avatāras*, those who come to instruct humanity in the *yuga-dharma*, the dispensation for that age. The *yuga-dharma* for every Dvāpara-yuga is *arcana*, or worship of the divine image in the temple. For every Kali-yuga, the *yuga-dharma* is *saikīrtana*, the congregational glorification of God. In all but one *yuga*-cycle, the *yuga-dharma* is taught by some Viṣṇu *avatāra*. We, however, are living in that particular cycle in which Kṛṣṇa himself—the root of all Viṣṇu expansions—descends. According to Kṛṣṇadāsa (Ādi-līlā 4.9-33), the time

for the routine appearance of a *yuga-avatāra* and the time for the rare appearance of Vraja Kṛṣṇa coincided. The *yuga-avatāra* descends to perform the work described in *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.6-7): To reestablish dharma, to destroy the ungodly, and to protect the godly. But in the case of Vṇdāvana Kṛṣṇa, these activities become secondary. Kṛṣṇa's real, confidential purpose is to allow the world a glimpse into his private life, thereby revealing the spontaneous devotion of his most cherished intimates, and disclosing himself in his most sweet and attractive feature. Thus he descended—or, speaking more precisely—the entire transcendental realm of Goloka Vṇdāvana descended, bringing with it Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and all its other residents.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the highest and most confidential transcendent abode was manifested for a time here on Earth.

Kṛṣṇa's descent in this manner makes pure, spontaneous devotional service possible in the world. Yet an obstacle remains to the realization of that possibility. Removing this obstacle is the mission—the external purpose—of Caitanya. Kṛṣṇadāsa depicts Kṛṣṇa as reflecting like this (Ādi-līlā 3.14-29): "For a long time I've not gifted the world with pure, spontaneous devotion (*prema-bhakti*). Without it, the world is useless. The whole world worships me under constraint of scriptural formalities (*vaidhi-bhakti*), but that has no power to bestow the ecstatic feelings found in Vraja (*vraja-bhāva*). The world's awareness of my majestic opulence (*aiśvarya*) undercuts *prema*, and such vitiated love does not attract me. By their formal, reverential devotion they go to Vaikuṇṭha, receiving the four types of liberation.<sup>16</sup> (But devotees never accept *sāyujya*, since that is oneness with Brahman.) I shall inaugurate the *yuga-dharma*, the congregational chanting of my names (*nāma-saṅkīrtana*). Giving four devotional ecstasies, I'll make all creation dance. I'll personally accept the mentality of a devotee, and by practicing devotional service myself, I will teach it. If one does not practice dharma, teaching it will not be effective: this conclusive truth is sung in *Gītā* and *Bhāgavatam*.<sup>17</sup> My expansion (*aṁśa*) can inaugurate the *yuga-dharma*, but no one but me can give *vraja-prema*. Therefore I shall descend on Earth together with my devotees, and in their company execute many kinds of colorful diversions." Thinking like this (writes Kṛṣṇadāsa) Kṛṣṇa himself descended in Nadia early in Kali-yuga.

Here is a further description of Caitanya's public mission:

The characteristics of Kṛṣṇa are understood to be a storehouse of transcendental love. Although that storehouse of love certainly came with Kṛṣṇa

when He was present, it was sealed. But when Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came with His associates of the Pañca-tattva, they broke the seal and plundered the storehouse to taste transcendental love of Kṛṣṇa. The more they tasted it, the more their thirst for it grew. Śrī Pañca-tattva themselves danced again and again and thus made it easier to drink nectarean love of Godhead. They danced, cried, laughed and chanted like madmen, and in this way they distributed love of Godhead. In distributing love of Godhead, Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His associates did not consider who was a fit candidate and who was not, nor where such distribution should or should not take place. They made no conditions. Wherever they got the opportunity, the members of the Pañca-tattva distributed love of Godhead.

—Ādi-līlā 7.20-23<sup>18</sup>

In summary, the highly confidential vraja-līlā having been revealed during Kṛṣṇa's descent, it then becomes Caitanya's mission to offer us in this world actual entry into that exclusive and hidden region of divine life. Because of Caitanya's gift, what is secret, "inaccessible to the Vedas,"<sup>19</sup> becomes an open secret, made available to all. That is the exoteric side of Caitanya's appearance.

Esoterically, the eternal person of Caitanya embodies the final dialectical moment within the everlasting conjugal interchange between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya's position is described by Kṛṣṇadāsa in one of the opening Sanskrit verses:

*rādhā kṛṣṇa-praṇaya-vikṛtir hlādinī śaktir asmād  
ekātmānāv api bhuvi purā deha-bhedam gatau tau  
caitanyākhyam prakaṣam adhunā tad-dvayam caikyam āptam  
rādhā-bhāva-dyuti-suvalitam naumi kṛṣṇa-svarūpam*

—Ādi-līlā 1.5, 4.55

Rādhā is the transformation of Kṛṣṇa's love and His internal pleasure-giving potency. Accordingly, the pair Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one in identity [*ekātmānau*], even though the two have ever manifest themselves as separate individuals [*deha-bhedam*]. Now that couple [*tad-dvayam*] have achieved reunion in the manifestation known as Caitanya. To him I pay obeisances, who is in essence Kṛṣṇa himself, yet bedecked with the emotions and complexion of Rādhā.

To understand this, it is important to recognize that for the Gauḍīyas,

"Rādhā," "Kṛṣṇa," and "Caitanya" are not symbols denoting mere abstract hypostases or metaphysical principles. As divine embodiments, they are fully concrete, particular individuals, yet they are, so to speak, universal individuals, being wholly identical with the ontological principles they personify. Here, personification is not a literary device but rather illustrates a cosmic truth. Ultimate reality is irreducibly personal, relational, variegated, dynamic, and progressive. Only narrative can express the final truth.

All this stands in contrast to the Vedānta of Śaṅkara, which holds that ultimate reality (Brahman) is devoid of any differentiation or specification (*viśeṣa*). It is *nirviśeṣa*. Nor does Brahman, although prominently defined as the ultimate origin of the world (*janmādy asya yataḥ*), actually turn out to produce any world—spiritual or material—or to be in any relation to a world whatsoever. Brahman has no energies or potencies, and the apparent world, being a logical and ontological impossibility, is attributed to *vivarta*, or illusion only. To understand Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya one must set aside any monistic proclivities, as well as any intellectualistic disposition (the Western legacy of Hellenic modes of philosophizing), to think of the abstract as somehow possessing more reality or value than the concrete.

Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya are spiritual persons, but they are not thereby considered to be disembodied beings or mental entities—some type of abstract, partial, or attenuated personalities. Quite the contrary, they are fully persons, in complete spiritual embodiment. In the Vaiṣṇava way of thinking, it is simply true by definition that to be a person means to have a body. First of all, to be a person means to be endowed with senses. This means specifically the ten instruments of perception and action, the *jñāna-indriyas* and the *karma-indriyas*. By the *jñāna-indriyas*—the instruments of hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling—the world acts on the living being, becoming present in specific ways to consciousness. By the *karma-indriyas*—the instruments of manipulation, locomotion, sound production, reproduction, and evacuation—the living being acts back on the world. *Manas*, or mind, the central interior sense, is also sometimes categorized among the *indriyas* (See, e.g., BhG 13.6, 15.7; BhP 3.32.19). Thus, 'person' means an individual endowed with the faculties to perceive and act within an environment. Second, a person is by definition embodied because a 'body' is simply some organized array of senses (*indriyas*.) In European thought God is commonly conceived of as some sort of disincarnate mind, but that to the Vaiṣṇava is to imagine a severely deprived or handicapped person—in fact, a person sunken to the extremely unfortunate sta-



tus of a *bhūta*, a ghost.

Therefore, Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya have eternal existence as spiritually embodied personages. We began, ontologically, with the one absolute source of all beings, who manifests from eternity a root distinction as Kṛṣṇa, the primordial cosmological masculine principle, the possessor of all energies (*pūrṇa-śaktiman*), and as Rādhā, the primordial cosmological feminine principle, the energy (*pūrṇa-śakti*). Even though they are manifest as two, they remain one inseparably, just as musk and its scent, or fire and its heat, remain inseparable.<sup>20</sup> Yet Kṛṣṇa manifests this internal distinction of male and female in order to increase his bliss. The relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is the prototype of the male-female sexual relation in this world, yet their transcendent erotic activity conducted in spiritual bodies has a quite different character from its mundane inverted reflection, which is fleeting, inebriating, and only increases bondage and ignorance. In fact, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.33.39) states, Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the young women of Vraja are of such a nature that one who properly and faithfully hears and narrates them will quickly drive away lust, that affliction of the human heart.

Kṛṣṇadāsa is careful to distinguish the original erotic attraction between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa—which is *prema*, actual love—from its debased material reflection, *kāma* or lust. “The desire to give pleasure to one's own senses I call *kāma*, but the desire to give pleasure to the senses of Kṛṣṇa bears the name *prema*” (Ādi-līlā 4.165).<sup>21</sup> In his extended discussion on this matter (Ādi-līlā 4.162-213), Kṛṣṇadāsa emphasizes that *prema* is utterly without any selfish desire. Rādhā and other *gopīs* have no other way of experiencing pleasure except by seeing that Kṛṣṇa is pleased in every respect, and they strive actively, setting aside all other consideration, to increase Kṛṣṇa's pleasure. Kṛṣṇadāsa's idea of love seems to include and go beyond a frequently encountered Christian definition (attributed to Augustine), “love means to want the other to be.” The Vaiṣṇava and the Christian definition both contain the idea of a well-wishing attitude, untinged by envy. But Kṛṣṇadāsa's definition adds the further important element of activity—to do something to increase the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa's senses. Kṛṣṇadāsa's definition also contains the idea—he will make this explicit—that Kṛṣṇa's bliss is ever-increasing, and the role of the devotee is to contribute to that increase. So we must also augment the Christian notion with this progressive element. The service of *prema* by Rādhā and her *gopī* companions is the agent through which Kṛṣṇa's spiritual attributes eternally increase and unfold. Therefore,



following Kṛṣṇadāsa, we would have to say that love means not just wanting the other to be, but to serve the other in realizing more and more of what he really is, and in this way making a full contribution to that unending revelation.

The transactions of *prema* take place between persons whose bodies are spiritual. There are some considerations which may help give a notion of the difference between material and spiritual embodiment. With regard to souls fallen in this material world, the self, the *jīvātmā*, has acquired a false identity (*ahaṁkāra*), and so is quite different from the gross and subtle material coverings that clothe it.<sup>22</sup> This is not the case regarding transcendent personages like Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and their entourage. Kṛṣṇadāsa narrates how Caitanya's close associate Svarūpa Dāmodara rebuked a writer who distinguished the Lord from his body:

"You are in complete illusion, for you have distinguished between the body and the soul of His Lordship [Lord Jagannātha or Caitanya Mahāprabhu]. That is a great offense. At no time is there a distinction between the body and the soul of the Supreme Personality of Godhead [*nāhi kabhu dehi-dehabheda*]. His personal identity [*svarūpa*] and His body are made of blissful spiritual energy [*cid-ānanda*]. There is no distinction between them. 'There is no distinction between the body and the soul of the Supreme Personality of Godhead at any time.'"

—Antya-līlā 5.121-123<sup>23</sup>

The differences that pertain to persons in material embodiment—as between the soul and the body, the soul and the mind, the mind and the body—do not apply to persons manifest in spiritual existence. In the spiritually embodied state, the unity of parts attains a holographic inclusiveness. In the *Brahma-saṁhitā* (32), Kṛṣṇa's body is characterized as a form of glory, made of bliss, truth, and eternality (*ānanda-cinmaya-sad-ujjvala-vigrahasya*), and each limb or sense possess the powers of all the others (*aṅgāni yasya sakalendriya-vṛtti-manti*). Commenting on this text, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, an important Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theologian and the teacher of A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami, explains the unified nature of spiritual bodies exhibited by Kṛṣṇa and liberated *jīvas* as well:

The soul and the body of Kṛṣṇa are identical, whereas the body and soul of fallen creatures are not so. In the spiritual sphere there is no such difference as that between the body and soul, between the limbs and their propri-

etor, between the attributes and the object possessing them, of this world. But such difference really exists in the case of conditioned souls. Limbed though Kṛṣṇa is, His every limb is the whole entity. He performs all varieties of divine spiritual functions with every one of His limbs. Hence He is an indivisible whole and a perfect transcendental entity. Both *jīva*-soul and Kṛṣṇa are transcendental. So they belong to the same category. But they differ in this, that the transcendental attributes exist in the *jīva*-soul in infinitesimally small degrees, whereas in Kṛṣṇa they are found in their fullest perfection.<sup>24</sup>

From this we understand that the exchanges of love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in spiritual bodies attain, by even the slightest of stimuli—say, the lingering trace of a bodily fragrance, the momentary contact of side-long glances—a degree of intensity and intimacy unachievable by the most consummate of unions in this world. This relationship, internal to the Godhead, conducted through spiritual senses, taking the form of an ever-inventive, perpetually enriching sequence of variations and elaborations, is the impelling engine for an unending expansion of the beauty, knowledge, and bliss of divinity. Gazing upon Rādhā, taking in her youthful form, her restless eyes, her radiant smile, her maddening fragrance,<sup>25</sup> Kṛṣṇa becomes overwhelmed by her beauty—all her spiritual perfections being perfectly bodied forth as the captivating graces of her person, her dress, and her ornaments—and Kṛṣṇa's joy wells up. As his happiness thus increases, his own beauty likewise increases. (Even in this world internal happiness enhances external beauty, though disjunctions among body, mind, and soul unfortunately impose limits. In spiritual bodies, however, joyfulness of mind and beauty of body become seamlessly fused.) When in turn Rādhā now sees that Kṛṣṇa's beauty has surpassed itself, her joy soars higher and her beauty is transported along with it. And as Kṛṣṇa sees Rādhā's beauty increasing even further, it causes his joy to expand yet again, and so his beauty increases . . . and so it goes on, a rivalry between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in a contest of eternally expanding joy and beauty, without any end.<sup>26</sup>

To aid in this increase is the mission of Caitanya in this world. *saṅkīrtana*, the consummate chanting of the names of God, is meant to arouse the sleeping souls to come to assist Rādhā in contributing to Kṛṣṇa's happiness. Thus, Caitanya characterizes *saṅkīrtana* with the words *ānandāmbudhi-vardhanam*, "causing the ocean of transcendent bliss to increase."<sup>27</sup> The one Kṛṣṇa has manifest as two, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇadāsa has explained, in order taste pleasure. That taste, arising from reciprocation, is by its very nature

ever-increasing. Caitanya himself is a further element of that increase, being on the internal side a development of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's mutual attraction, and on the external side a bringer of others to contribute to and participate in that increase. By manifesting his *hlādinī-sakti*, Kṛṣṇa becomes Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Now, becoming one again, Kṛṣṇa, as it were, reassimilates Rādhā—not by negating her but rather by assimilating himself into her. In so doing he does not go back to being mere Kṛṣṇa again, but rather goes forward, in a dialectical manner, to manifest a third truth, a further revelation, the final enrichment and augmentation: this is Caitanya Mahāprabhu—Kṛṣṇa become Rādhā.

Two of the introductory Sanskrit verses of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* set forth the confidential reasons for Caitanya's manifestation (Ādi-līlā 1.5-6). We have already considered the first of them. Here is the second:

*śrī-rādhāyāḥ praṇaya-mahimā kīḍṣo vānayaivā-  
svādyo yenādbhuta-madhurimā kīḍṣo vā madīyaḥ  
saukhyam cāsyā mad-anubhavataḥ kīḍṣam veti lobhāt  
tad-bhāvādhyāḥ samajani śaci-garbha-sindhau harīnduḥ*

Desiring to understand the glory of Rādhārāṇī's love, the wonderful qualities in Him that She alone relishes through Her love, and the happiness She feels when She realizes the sweetness of His love, the Supreme Lord Hari, richly endowed with Her emotions, appeared from the womb of Śrīmatī Śaci-devī, as the moon appeared from the ocean.

Kṛṣṇa has three urgent desires (*lobha*) that he cannot fulfill so long as he remains in the position of the love-object (*viṣaya*). Even in his Vraja-līlā, exceptional though it is, he is unable to satisfy his three further longings. He can only satisfy them if he assumes the counter-position, that of the loving subject (*āśraya*). Thus, he manifests himself as Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the son of Śaci-devī, to assume for himself the position and features of a devotee (*bhakta-rūpa*). Caitanya is Kṛṣṇa himself (*kṛṣṇa-svarūpa*) invested with the luster (*dyuti*) and the emotions (*bhāva*) of Rādhārāṇī.<sup>28</sup> In this way he can explore and enjoy for himself the furthest limit of *prema-bhakti*, which only Rādhā herself has experienced.

Kṛṣṇadāsa explicates the meaning of Kṛṣṇa's three-fold yearning in Ādi-līlā 4.119-221 and in Ādi-līlā 4.229-273. He describes Kṛṣṇa's own amazement and wonder at Rādhā's love for him. Kṛṣṇa reflects that he is *sat-cit-ananda* and the source of all *rasas*; yet Rādhā's love has the power to over-

whelm and control him. Moreover, however much pleasure he enjoys from her, Rādhā's enjoyment is always far greater. Her love abounds in contradictions: it is unlimited, and yet it constantly expands; it is momentous, yet devoid of any pride; it is spotlessly pure, yet always crooked and devious. This extraordinary love has its highest residence (*āśraya*) in Rādhā, and it has Kṛṣṇa as its sole object (*viśaya*). Certainly Kṛṣṇa enjoys all the pleasure entitled him as her love's object. Nevertheless, Rādhā, the loving subject, feels a pleasure ten million times greater. Kṛṣṇa's mind becomes curious and eager to taste that pleasure. Yet, limited by his position as the love-object, he remains baffled, and his desire increases more and more. *Madīyaḥ saukhyaṁ cāsyā mad-anubhavataḥ kīdṛśam*: "What is the happiness like that she experiences through her realization of my sweetness?"

Kṛṣṇa contemplates his own beauty: "My sweetness is wonderful, unlimited, and full, and Rādhā alone always tastes, through her love, all the nectar of that sweetness. Her love is as spotless as a clean mirror; yet its clarity always increases. My sweetness similarly has no scope to expand; yet before that mirror it shines with newer and newer beauty. In the constant competition between my sweetness and the mirror of Rādhā's love, neither admits defeat and both go on increasing constantly. When I see my own sweet beauty in a mirror, I desire to taste it myself; yet I cannot. And when I ponder the means, I find my mind hankering after the condition of Rādhā." In this way, Kṛṣṇa's sweet beauty irresistibly attracts everyone—even Kṛṣṇa himself.<sup>29</sup> When he cannot slake his thirst to taste it, his mind fills with anguish. *Anayaivāsuvādyo yenādbhuta-madhurimā kīdṛśaḥ*: "What is the extraordinary sweetness in me like that she alone is able to taste by her love?"

The love seen in the *gopīs* is exceptionally powerful and spotlessly pure. Being without a tinge of selfish desire (*kāma*), their love, in its single-minded dedication to giving Kṛṣṇa pleasure, is so great that Kṛṣṇa himself has confessed his inability to match it. (He made a promise to give himself to his devotees as they give themselves to him. Yet in regard to the *gopīs* he admitted that he could not keep it.)<sup>30</sup> The *gopīs* have no interest at all in their own pleasure, and yet when they see that Kṛṣṇa is pleased, they find themselves filled with a joy millions of times greater than his. This is because the happiness of the *gopīs* resides wholly and solely in that of their beloved Kṛṣṇa. At the same time, it is the joy of the *gopīs* itself that gives Kṛṣṇa great pleasure. Their joy increases their beauty. Through the reciprocation of love, the beauty and joy of both Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* increase everlastingly. The *gopīs* are so intent on pleasing Kṛṣṇa that they become angry at their

own ecstasy if its symptoms interfere with their service. They want no benedictions—not even those of liberation—other than that service. Because the *gopīs* know Kṛṣṇa more intimately than anyone else, they are accomplished experts in pleasing him—they are his helpers, teachers, disciples, servants, friends, and consorts. Among all *gopīs*, Rādhā is the best, surpassing the others in beauty, good qualities, good fortune, and most of all, in love. She alone is the most beloved. In fact, the *gopīs'* job is to assist Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their mutual enjoyment. Without Rādhā, even they cannot please Kṛṣṇa. Her love and joy thus surpass Kṛṣṇa's own; yet he longs to grasp it. *Śrī-rādhāyāḥ praṇaya-mahimā kīdṛśaḥ*: "What is the greatness of Śrī Rādhā's love?"

In order to win the contest of love and bliss between himself and Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa finds that he cannot do it from his own position as the object of devotion, and this impels him to assume her position as the devoted subject. Therefore, he himself becomes his own devotee, manifesting the person of Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Thus, Caitanya is the concretized form of Kṛṣṇa's ultimate tribute to Rādhā. As Caitanya, Kṛṣṇa enters into Rādhā's experiences and explores for himself the extremes of love known only to her. At the same time he descends to teach the world *bhakti* by practicing it himself. Caitanya is the one who most fully reveals Rādhā to the world, and who teaches the method of serving Kṛṣṇa perfected by Rādhā and her associates.

This method was taken up intensively by the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, to whose circle Kṛṣṇadāsa belonged. According to their teachings, in the advanced levels of spiritual development, after one has become cleared of almost all material desires (*anartha-nivṛtti*) and one's practice has become firmly fixed and steady (*niṣṭhā*), there develops a taste for the activities of devotional practice (*ruci*), and after that the practitioner (*sādhaka*) becomes attracted to the point of obsession with the particular service of one of Kṛṣṇa's eternal associates in Vraja and becomes addicted to meditating unceasingly upon Kṛṣṇa showing just those looks and deeds that most arouse the associate's feelings (*āśakti*). In this way, the *sādhaka's* own eternal relation with Kṛṣṇa begins to manifest itself in the form of spontaneous emotional ecstasies (*bhāva*), which, by becoming enriched and intensified, mature into *prema*.<sup>31</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa explains (Madhya-līlā 22:156-157) that a devotee nearing perfection serves in two forms, with a dual identity. Externally, the devotee displays the body of a regular practitioner (*sādhaka-deha*) engaged in chanting, hearing, worshiping, and so on, while internal-

ly, in a spiritual or perfected body (*siddha-deha*), meditating all day and night, the devotee simultaneously serves Kṛṣṇa in Vraja, following in the footsteps of one of Vraja's eternal residents.<sup>32</sup>

When Kṛṣṇa descended as Caitanya, all the other residents of Vraja also descended in devotee forms. The Six Gosvāmīs, like the other associates of Caitanya, are also eternal associates of Vraja Kṛṣṇa. Specifically, they belong in the entourage of Rādhā's confidential servants in the position of *mañjarīs*, who act as aids to the *gopīs* known as *sakhīs*. Immediate assistants to Rādhā, the *sakhīs* have the spiritual forms of mature adolescent girls, while the *mañjarīs* are younger girls, just on the verge of adolescence, when the union of innocence and awakening feelings can produce the most extreme emotional attachment.

While the *sakhīs*, at Rādhā's insistence, may engage in direct union with Kṛṣṇa, the participation of the *mañjarī* is entirely vicarious. Yet they are in some way much closer to Rādhā than the older *gopīs*. Because of their age, Rādhā allows them to attend exchanges between herself and Kṛṣṇa from which she excludes, out of shyness, the *gopīs* who are her contemporaries. Also typical of their age, the *mañjarīs* are more fervently attached to Rādhā than even to Kṛṣṇa. Finally, the *mañjarīs* most explicitly manifest the pure and selfless nature of *prema*.<sup>33</sup>

For most Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṇḍāvana are the paradigm of the followers of Caitanya. By following them, the devotees hope to gain their grace, and by their grace receive the grace of Rādhā, when she allows the devotee a taste of her own inconceivable love for Kṛṣṇa. The devotees aspire in that way to be initiated into the eternal company of the Gosvāmīs, associating with them as they engage in the spiritual pastimes of Caitanya and of Vraja Kṛṣṇa simultaneously. By so doing, they hope to participate fully in the divine life of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya, which forever increases the ocean of spiritual bliss.

## ENDNOTES

1. A. K. Majumdar (p. 95) calls *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* "an epitome of Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇava philosophy." For the date of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, see De, p. 56. In Ādi-līlā 8.50-85, Kṛṣṇadāsa tells how he came to write his work.

2. See, e.g., Madhya-līlā 6.160 and Madhya-līlā 8.151-152. The third major division of Kṛṣṇa's potency is *jīva-śakti*, comprising the individual souls. Because a *jīva* can dwell either within the external energy (as a conditioned soul) or within the internal energy (as a liberated soul), the *jīva-śakti* is characterized as *taṭa-sthā*, nei-

ther internal nor external but rather marginal, being limitrophic.

3. *Brahma-saṁhitā* 6-10. According to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, this text, purported to be the surviving fifth chapter of longer lost work, was discovered by Caitanya in the temple of Ādi-keśava in Tamal Nadu, and he propagated it widely among his followers.

4. As O. B. L. Kapoor puts it (p.95), "The Antaraṅgā or Svarūpa-śakti, as the name indicates, constitute [sic] the very essence or the intrinsic self of Bhagavān and is the substratum of the entire Cit-jagat or the transcendental world in which are displayed the transcendental activities (*līlā*) of Bhagavān (*Gītā*, IV, 6)."

5. See Introduction, *Philosophers Speak of God*, pp. 1-15, and *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, pp. 227-244. The Prologue to *Philosophers Speak of God* is a series of quotations from theologians containing anticipations of Hartshorne's "bipolar" idea of God. Interestingly, the first excerpt is from the doctoral dissertation "The Philosophy of Sri Jiva Goswami (Vaisnava Vedanta of the Bengal School)" (Swift Hall Library, University of Chicago, 1937) written by Mahanam Brata Brahmachari under Hartshorne's direction at Chicago.

6. "Devotees who are correctly situated in a transcendental relationship with Kṛṣṇa are attracted by loving features, not by a godless display of opulences" (purport to BhG 11.8).

7. *vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvaṁ yaj jñānam advayam/ brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavān iti śabdyate.*

8. *Kṛṣṇa-sandarbha*, Anuccheda 29. Jīva Gosvāmī defines *paribhāṣā-sūtra* in 29.7: "A *paribhāṣā-sūtra* explains the proper method for understanding a book. It gives the key by which one may understand the actual purport of a series of apparently unrelated facts and arguments."

9. *ete cāmśa-kalāḥ pumsaḥ kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam/ indrāri-uyākulaṁ lokam mṛdayanti yuge yuge.* Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's explication of this text occurs in *Ādi-līlā* 2.67-85.

10. The opulence is fully present, but its manifestation is suppressed. The first of the "Govindam prayers" in the *Brahma-saṁhitā* (29), in which Brahmā records his spiritual vision of Vraja, makes this clear: *cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu kalpa-vṛkṣa-lakṣāvṛteṣu surabhir abhipālayantam/ lakṣmī-sahasra-śata-sambhrama-sevāmānaṁ govindam ādi-puruṣam tam aham bhajāmi.* Govinda, as his name indicates, is engaged in the humble occupation of herding cows; yet he is the Ādi-puruṣa, the primordial Lord. And each of the cows he herds is a surabhi or *kāma-dhenu*, one alone of which will fulfill all desires; each of the hundreds of thousands of forest trees is a *kalpa-vṛkṣa*, a tree of plenty, yielding any fruit wanted; the dwelling are made of *cintāmaṇi* gems, whose touch transmutes any metal to gold; and the each of the thousands of village girls who attend Govinda is a *lakṣmī-devī*, a goddess of fortune.

11. Indeed, Kṛṣṇadāsa goes on to say, whenever a demon must be killed, Kṛṣṇa does it through Viṣṇu, and it is actually Viṣṇu present in Kṛṣṇa who does the killing. This activity is but secondary. Kṛṣṇa's basic purpose (*mūla kāraṇa*) is to relish the

essence of pure love (*prema-rasa*) and to exhibit to the world spontaneous devotional service (*rāga-mārga bhakti*) (Ādi-līlā 4.13-16). In Madhya-līlā 20.153-402 the various expansions and *avatāras* of Kṛṣṇa are classified and described extensively.

12. Block translations from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* are by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, unless otherwise noted.

13. *rādhārā svarūpa*—*kṛṣṇa-prema-kalpalatā/ sakhi-gaṇa haya tāra pallava-puṣpa-pātā* (Madhya-līlā 8.209). Kṛṣṇadāsa writes this by way of commenting in Bengali on the metaphor contained in a Sanskrit verse from his own *Govinda-līlāmṛta* (10.16), which he then quotes in Madhya-līlā 8.211).

14. One day of Brahmā has the duration of a thousand yuga cycles (*divya-yugas*) (BhG 8.17), but there are 994 actual *yuga*-cycles. This is because within Brahmā's day the time equivalent to six *divya-yugas* are occupied by fifteen *sandhyās*, or transitions, which occur before the reign of each of the fourteen Manus, with one more following the last. Each *sandhyā* lasts four-tenths of a *divya-yuga*, equivalent to the duration of a Satya-yuga (1,728,000 earthly years).

Brahmā lives for one-hundred of his own years, and each year consists of twelve months of thirty days and nights each. Each day of Brahmā (also called a *kalpa*) equals 4.32 billion solar years. Each day also subtends the reigns of fourteen Manus (*manvantaras*). They last 306,720,000 solar years each. Thus, a *manvantara* equals seventy-one *divya-yugas* (of 4.32 million years each).

One *divya-yuga*, a cycle of four *yugas*, lasts twelve-thousand years of the gods, or 4.32 million earthly years. (One year of the gods equals 360 of our years). As for the *yuga*-cycle itself:

| Yuga                        | Divya years  | Solar years | % of Total |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| Satya                       | 4.8 thousand | 1,728,000   | 40%        |
| Treta                       | 3.6 thousand | 1,296,000   | 30%        |
| Dvapara                     | 2.4 thousand | 864,000     | 20%        |
| Kali                        | 1.2 thousand | 432,000     | 10%        |
| Total ( <i>divya-yuga</i> ) | 12 thousand  | 4,320,000   | 100%       |

By earthy calculation, the life-span of Brahmā is 311 trillion, 40 million solar years (4.32[day] x 2[day and night] x30 [a month]x12 [a year] x 100 [lifespans of Brahmā]).

15. Kṛṣṇadāsa quotes a text from *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta* (1.5.461), by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī: *kṛṣṇo 'nyo yadu-sambhūto yaḥ pūrṇaḥ so 'sty ataḥ paraḥ/ vṛndāvanam paṇītya sa kvacin naiva gacchati*. Kṛṣṇa never leaves Vṛndāvana. This is true virtually by definition, for when he does seem to go out—as to Mathurā to slay Kāṁsa—it is actually a Viṣṇu expansion ("another Kṛṣṇa" who is not *pūrṇa-bhagavān*) that continues his Mathurā and Dvārakā pastimes, where majesty (*aiśvarya*) now prevails over sweetness (*mādhurya*). Thus it is logically impossible for Kṛṣṇa to leave Vṛndāvana.

16. Kṛṣṇadāsa lists them: *sārṣṭi*, gaining opulences equal to the Lord's; *sārūpya*,



obtaining a four-armed form identical to the Lord's; *sāmīpya*, becoming a personal associate of the Lord; and *sālokyā*, living on a Vaikuṇṭha planet.

17. Here follow quotations from BhG 4.7-8, 3.24, 3.21.

18. The Pañca-tattva (the "Five Truths" or "Five Principles") refers to Lord Caitanya and his four principle associates. The standard iconographic representation shows the five standing, with Caitanya in the center, before a mat upon which the paraphernalia for worship (*ārati*) are laid out. Caitanya is Kṛṣṇa himself, now manifest in the form of a devotee; to his immediate right, stand Nityānanda, who is Kṛṣṇa's first expansion Balarāma now also in devotee form. On his right stands Advaita Ācārya, the devotee form of Mahā-Viṣṇu, the first of the three *puruṣa-avatāras* who attend to the material creation. Thus on Caitanya's right are manifested Viṣṇu-tattva forms, known categorically as *śaktimān*, the possessor of energies. On his left the energies (*śakti-tattva*) are represented in devotee embodiment. On Caitanya's immediate left is Gadādhara, who is Rādhā, the internal energy, and on his left Śrīvāsa, who is Nārada Muni, represents the *jīva-śakti* or marginal potency. Recording a specific epiphany that took place at the house of Śrīvāsa, the Pañca-tattva reveals to Caitanya's followers the supernatural identities of the major figures in their community, a coherent display of principle categories within the absolute truth, all manifest as devotees: the Lord, his expansions, his incarnations, his internal energy, and his marginal energy.

19. In *Brahma-saṁhitā* (33), Vraja Kṛṣṇa is described as "inaccessible to the Vedas, but obtainable by [pure] devotion of the soul" (*vedeṣu durlabham adurlabham ātma-bhaktau*).

20. Kṛṣṇadāsa expounds on Ādi-līlā 1.5, 4.55 in Ādi-līlā 4.56-100. The examples of heat and fire and scent and musk are common illustrations of the Gauḍīya doctrine concerning the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and his energies: *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*, the principle that the two are inconceivably different and at the same time non-different. It may be helpful to meditate upon this teaching after the manner of a Zen koan, when it is expressed like this: "Nothing is different from Kṛṣṇa; yet Kṛṣṇa is different from everything." Or: "There is nothing but Kṛṣṇa; yet nothing is Kṛṣṇa save and except his own primordial personality."

21. *ātmendriya-prīti-vāñchā*—*tāre balī 'kāma' / kṛṣṇendriya-prīti-icchā dhare 'prema' nāma*.

22. According to the précis in ontology delivered by Kṛṣṇa in BhG 7.2-7, the elements that make up the gross and subtle (or psychic) coverings of embodied souls (*jīva*) derive from the material or "separated" energy (*bhinnā prakṛtiḥ*), while the souls themselves come from another energy (*anyām prakṛtim*), a superior (*parā*) or spiritual energy. Both, however, have their origin in Kṛṣṇa, beyond whom there is nothing higher. According to this picture, the spiritual self, the true identity of the embodied, is no way related to the changing bodies it inhabits. This ontological map shows how liberation—the release of the spirit from material bondage—is possible. The misapprehension of the self as the body (*ahaṅkāra*) is the very cause of

bondage. This view of the identity of the self as essentially non-material is common to the orthodox traditions of *bhakti*-, *jñāna*-, and *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. In the Vaiṣṇava bhakti tradition, however, in the liberated state there is a “return” so to speak of the body, but in this the idea of the body undergoes sublation into the concept of a spiritual body or *siddha-deha*.

23. *āra eka kariyācha parama 'pramāda'! / deha-dehi-bheda īṣvare kaile 'aparādha'!*  
*īṣvarera nāhi kabhu deha-dehi-bheda / svarūpa, deha, —cid-ānanda, nāhika vibhe-*  
*da / “deha-dehi-vibhāgo 'yam/ neṣvare vidyate kvacit”*

The Sanskrit proof-text can be found in Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta* 1.5.342, which gives the *Kūrma Purāṇa* as its source.

24. *Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā*, p. 53-54.

25. In *Madhya-līlā* 23.87-91, Kṛṣṇadāsa presents a list of the twenty-five most prominent of Rādhā's qualities taken from Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* (*Śrī-rādhā-prakaraṇa* 11-15).

26. This description follows Kṛṣṇadāsa's account of the competition in joy and beauty between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* in *Ādi-līlā* 4.185-195. For the identity between the inner characteristics and outward adornments of Rādhā's spiritual body, see *Madhya-līlā* 8.165-181. The description of the person of Rādhā by Kṛṣṇadāsa is based on *Premāmbhoja-maranda* by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī.

27. This is from the first of the eight Sanskrit *Śikṣāṣṭaka* prayers by Caitanya. These are the only writings attributed directly to Caitanya. They can be found, with extensive explications in Bengali, in *Antya-līlā* 20.11-65.

28. *Ādi-līlā* 1.5: *rādhā-bhāva-dyuti-suvalitām naumi kṛṣṇa-svarūpam*. Caitanya is said to have the same golden complexion (*dyuti*) as Rādhā, and each accordingly bears feminine and masculine versions of the same names that mean “golden one” and “golden limbed.” Rādhā is *Gaurī* and *Gaurāṅgī*; Caitanya, *Gaura* and *Gaurāṅga*.

29. In *Madhya-līlā* 8.148. Kṛṣṇadāsa states that “Kṛṣṇa's own sweetness steals away his own mind, and he desires to embrace himself.” Then he quotes a verse from Rūpa Gosvāmī's drama *Lalīta-mādhava* (8.34), in which Kṛṣṇa, having caught sight of his own reflection in one of the bejeweled pillars of his *Dvārakā* palace, exclaims at the unprecedented beauty and sweetness of his image, and says his mind is bewildered, for he yearns impetuously to enjoy it, just like Rādhārāṇī.

30. Kṛṣṇadāsa cites Kṛṣṇa's promise at BhG 4.11: *ye yathā mān prapadyante tāmṣ tathaiva bhajāmy aham*, and his admission of failure to the *gopīs* at BhP 10.32.22: *na pārāye 'ham niravadya-samujām sva-sādhu-kṛtyām vibudhāyusāpi vaḥ*—“I am not able to repay My debt for your spotless service, even within a lifetime of *Brahmā*.”

31. The sequence of stages leading to *prema* are given by Rūpa Gosvāmī in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.4.15-16). Kṛṣṇadāsa quotes these texts in *Madhya-līlā* 23.14-15. An elaborate exposition of each of these stages is given by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, a great mystic and devotional theologian in the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava tradition, in *Mādhurya Kādamini*.

32. Kṛṣṇadāsa then quotes, in support, a text from *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.29:

sevā sādha-rūpeṇa siddha-rūpeṇa cātra hi/tad-bhāva-lipsunā kāryā vraja-lokānusārataḥ.

33. The different categories of *gopīs* are extensively described in Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* and in Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's summary study *Ujjvala-nīlamanī-kiraṇa*. In English one may consult Śivārāma Svāmī, Na Pāraye 'Ham, Appendix 2, and Steven Rosen, *The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan*, Afterword and Appendix.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Goswami Ṭhākura. *Śrī Brahma-Saṁhitā*. Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1985.
- Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, A. C. *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*. Complete Edition, Revised and Enlarged. Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1983.
- . *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī*. With the original Bengali text, roman transliteration, English equivalents, translation, and elaborate purports. 9 Vols. Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1996.
- . *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam [Bhāgavata Purāṇa]*: With the Original Sanskrit Text, Its Roman Transliteration, Synonyms, Translation and Elaborate Purports. 12 Vols. Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1988.
- Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. "Śrī Rādhāṣṭaka" [from *Gītāvalī*]. In *The Songs of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura*. N.p.: ISKCON Press, 1980.
- De, Sushil Kumar. *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*. 2nd Edition. Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1961. Reprint, 1986.
- Hartshorne, Charles. Introduction to *Philosophers Speak of God*, edited by Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953.
- . *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*. La Salle, IL: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1970.
- Kapoor, O. B. L. *The Philosophy and Religion of Śrī Caitanya: The Philosophical Background of the Hare Krishna Movement*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1976.
- Majumdar, A. K. *Caitanya: His Life and Doctrine: A Study in Vaiṣṇavism*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1969.

Rosen, Steven. *The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan*. New Revised Edition. Brooklyn: Folk Books, 1991.

Śivarāma Svāmī. *Na Pāraye 'Ham: I Am Unable to Repay You. Kṛṣṇa In Vṛndāvaṇa: Volume Two*. Lāl Kiado, Hungary, 2000.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. *Mādhurya Kādambinī: Cloud Bank of Nectar*. Translated by Deena Bandhu Dāsa. Nandagram, U. P.: Vrinda Trust, 1993.

**RŪPA'S RĀDHĀ:  
PASSIONATE, WORSHIPFUL, STRONG-WILLED, DIVINE**

Donna M. Wulff

**R**ūpa Gosvāmi's *Vidagdhamādhava* ("Clever Krishna") is a long sixteenth-century drama on the love of Rādhā and Krishna written in a difficult late-medieval Sanskrit style ornamented with numerous figures of speech and abstruse, verse-length puns.<sup>1</sup> It is not known whether it was ever enacted; if not, it would have been accessible—at least for the first century after its composition—only to persons learned in Sanskrit. Even its Bengali verse rendering by Yadunandanadāsa in the seventeenth century was in all likelihood read only by the fairly small number of Vaiṣṇavas and others in Braj and eastern India at the time who were literate in Bengali.

Why, then, should we concern ourselves with Rūpa's elite play and its representation of Rādhā? There are some compelling reasons for us to do so. First, from the early decades of the Gauḍiya or Bengali Vaiṣṇava community,<sup>2</sup> its members have regarded Rūpa as one of its highest authorities.<sup>3</sup> In addition to his most important theological-aesthetic works, the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* and the *Ujjaṇīlāmāṇī*,<sup>4</sup> his two full-length dramas, especially the *Vidagdhamādhava*, have been highly cherished components of the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava canon. Because of Rūpa's eminence, furthermore, his writings have subsequently been transmitted to a wide audience through more accessible Bengali writings and dramatic musical performances. They are frequently cited and quoted by the biographers of Caitanya, especially Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, the author of the most widely renowned biography, the early seventeenth-century *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*. In this work, Kṛṣṇadāsa incorporates much of Rūpa's theory and excerpts from his two long plays, quoting Rūpa's Sanskrit verses and then paraphrasing them in Bengali.<sup>5</sup> More

than Yadunandanadāsa's Bengali rendering of the *Vidagdhamādhava*, therefore, Kṛṣṇadāsa's monumental work—which has been and continues to be expounded orally as well as read—has made important portions of Rūpa's writings widely accessible.

Rūpa's authority in matters of devotion is not confined to the past. Evidence of his contemporary significance is furnished by two leading singers of *padāvalī kīrtan*,<sup>6</sup> Nanda Kishor Das and Ramakrishna Das, who continued to perform well into the 1980s. Both these singers regularly quoted and cited Rūpa's works at key points in their *kīrtan* performances.<sup>7</sup> Also, as one might expect from his stature in the Vaiṣṇava community, Rūpa is an elegant writer highly trained in classical Sanskrit aesthetics and exceptionally well-versed in a broad spectrum of Sanskrit literary and devotional works. Many of the *Vidagdhamādhava*'s verses are delightful, and the work is virtually unique in its genre<sup>8</sup> in being thoroughly suffused with devotional feeling. Finally, Rūpa's dramatic works compel the attention of historians of religion interested in female conceptions of the divine in particular because both plays, and especially the *Vidagdhamādhava*, shed light on views of Rādhā's nature and status that were current during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

An interpretation of the nature and devotional significance of Rādhā in the *Vidagdhamādhava* involves attention to several interrelated issues. How important is she in the drama, and in what ways? To what extent does she serve as an ideal of loving devotion to Krishna, and to what extent is she, like Krishna, an object of such devotion? Finally, is she portrayed merely as an extraordinary human heroine, or does she, too, partake of divinity?

In what follows, we shall explore Rūpa's depiction of Rādhā in the *Vidagdhamādhava*, focusing in particular on the question of her divine status. We shall then see how Rūpa delineates her character and the modalities of her love by contrasting her with her chief rival, Candrāvalī, both in his play and in his *Ujvalanīlamani*. Finally, we shall return to the question of how accessible Rūpa's writings and their portrait of Rādhā have been to Vaiṣṇava devotees.

From the two opening benedictory verses and the prose that follows, one might well conclude that Krishna stands alone as the central figure of the *Vidagdhamādhava*. It is *his līlā* that is spoken of as a cool drink, to which Rādhā's love, like that of the other *gopīs*, is said merely to impart a certain flavor.<sup>10</sup> It is Krishna, too, who is said to have become incarnate as Caitanya, and it is his devotees' great love for Krishna that draws them to Vṛndāvana.

Yet a careful reading of the drama yields a rather different impression: the parallels between Rādhā and Krishna are in some ways extremely close, and Rādhā, especially because of her unique love, seems fully as significant for devotion as Krishna himself.

### Rādhā's Beauty

Although there are numerous references to Rādhā's loveliness in the *Vidagdhamādhava*, we find fewer details of her appearance than we do of Krishna's. Her clothes and ornaments are scarcely mentioned,<sup>11</sup> and the rapturous descriptions of her by the lovesick Krishna are cast almost exclusively in the conventional imagery of classical Sanskrit poetry. Like Krishna, she is termed radiant,<sup>12</sup> and her face, like his, is repeatedly compared to the moon (often to the moon's decided disadvantage).<sup>13</sup> In Rādhā's case, however, her luster is not part of a paradox, for unlike the dark Krishna, she is fair. In addition to her golden complexion, likened by turns to lightning (II.24; IV.22), to gold (VI.26), and to the yellow *campaka* flower (II.2), it is her graceful gestures,<sup>14</sup> especially the bewitching movements of her eyes and brows, that most frequently elicit Krishna's adulation. A charming expression of his response is the shy yet unmistakably enthusiastic observation confided by Krishna to Madhumaṅgala after he sees her for the first time: "She was, it seemed, instructing the does themselves in sidelong glances" (II.29). [For a brief explanation of the relation that Madhumaṅgala and the other characters in the play have to Rādhā and Krishna, please see Appendix One: Dramatis Personae.]

So remarkable is Rādhā's beauty that Paurṇamāsī credits it for Kaṁsa's knowledge of her (I.12.6) and Krishna refers to it as uncommon (*asādhārāṇā*) even among the host of lovely *gopīs* (II. 30.3). Yet in spite of its obvious importance, Rādhā's physical loveliness is less significant for devotion than certain of her other characteristics. The very passages to which I have just referred furnish evidence in support of his contention. In Paurṇamāsī's verse expanding upon her assertion that it is Rādhā's great beauty (*saundaryavṛnda*) that has brought her to Kaṁsa's attention, she employs a more inclusive phrase, *lokottarā guṇāśrī*, "the extraordinary wealth of her good qualities" (I.13). Responding to an objection by Madhumaṅgala, Krishna, too, qualifies his previous statement that his greater love for Rādhā is due to her sweet beauty (*mādhurī*).<sup>15</sup> When Madhumaṅgala surmises that Krish-

na loved her even before he saw her, and infers that his fascination with her cannot be simply the result of her beauty, Krishna agrees, concluding that it must be her "extraordinary greatness" (*mahimonnāha*)<sup>16</sup> that has brought about his intense preoccupation. In the remainder of the drama, it becomes evident that an essential constituent of this "greatness"—indeed, from the standpoint of devotion, its most important component—is her supreme love.<sup>17</sup>

### Rādhā's Love and Its Religious Modes of Expression

That Rādhā's passion for Krishna is no ordinary love is made explicit at a number of points throughout the drama.<sup>18</sup> Even in its earliest phases, it is remarkably intense:<sup>19</sup> so obsessed does she become with him after merely seeing his picture that Mukharā, upon hearing her words to an imaginary Krishna, deems her "mad."<sup>20</sup> It is in part because of the intensity of her emotion that Rādhā, like those who observe her, describes her state as fundamentally incomprehensible.<sup>21</sup> Equally remarkable is the steadfast quality of her love: unlike the fickle Krishna, Rādhā is utterly single-minded in her devotion to him. Even when his unfaithfulness becomes obvious, she continues to love him; the anguish of her *māna* (indignation) only underscores the strength of her passion.

Seeking the cause of the exceptional love for Krishna of Rādhā and her close friends, as well as that of Candrāvali and her companions, Nāndimukhī hypothesizes that it results from their worship of Sūrya and Caṇḍī. Paurṇamāsī hastens to set her straight on that point: their worship of the deities is only a ruse making it possible for them to go to the woods to meet Krishna; it is their love for him which is *sahaja*, "natural."<sup>22</sup> It is this spontaneous quality of Rādhā's love, evident throughout the drama, that sets it apart, for example, from that of the meditating hermits and *yogīs* described in II.17:<sup>23</sup> these have to strive to attain even for a moment the one-pointed concentration that simply comes naturally to Rādhā.

Although manifestly unselfconscious, Rādhā's love often expresses itself in religious modes that bear considerable significance for devotion. We have just noted Paurṇamāsī's verse contrasting Rādhā's total preoccupation with Krishna with the transitory state attained by the arduous efforts of hermits and *yogīs*. The obverse of Rādhā's single-minded concentration is her utter obliviousness to the world: Lalitā notes with astonishment this sublime



condition as she accompanies to a tryst the distracted Rādhā, who has put all her ornaments on wrong.<sup>24</sup> The image of a *yogī* is similarly evoked by the tender scene toward the end of the second act in which Rādhā's intense desire to see Krishna culminates in a supreme effort to make him appear before her eyes by meditating (*prañidhāna*).<sup>25</sup>

Further indications of the intensity of Rādhā's devotion to Krishna are the numerous passages in which she expresses her inability to live without meeting him (e.g., III.12). At the end of Act II, as she contemplates suicide because of Krishna's rejection of her, she asks Viśākhā to allow her body to remain in Vṛndāvana with her vine-like arm on the trunk of the *tamāla* tree.<sup>26</sup> Early in the next act, in response to Paurṇamāsī's discouraging words, she expresses a similar aspiration: that she might die and be reborn as a bee on Krishna's forest garland, wholly intent upon his redolent face.<sup>27</sup> Classical Sanskrit dramas abound in examples of pining heroines who express the desire to take their own lives; here, however, the motif gains new significance, for Rādhā's utterances are indicative of a profound religious devotion that extends beyond death.

Still more obviously significant for devotion are the passages that depict Rādhā's response to the name "Krishna." Even before her first meeting with him, she shows emotion whenever her friends mention him by name, as they do deliberately. It is in this connection that Rūpa indicates most clearly the intimate relation between Rādhā's emotion and the experience of ardent Vaiṣṇava devotees. When Nāndimukhī describes Rādhā's *pūrvavarāga* by enumerating the effects of Krishna's name on her (I.14.30-31), Paurṇamāsī deems Rādhā's response fitting, and eloquently expresses her own feelings in the following oft-quoted verse (I.15):

Dancing on the tip of your tongue,  
they make you long for of mouths,  
Alighting in the hollow of your ear,  
they make you wish for ears in plenitude,  
And when they reach the doorway to your heart,  
they still the turbulence of all the senses:  
"Krish-na"—just two syllables—  
yet how much nectar do they not contain?

By means of Paurṇamāsī's endorsement, Rādhā's response is explicitly established as an ideal for Vaiṣṇava devotion. That Rādhā also takes a more active role in relation to this name of her beloved is indicated by a punning

verse in which Viśakhā describes her as constantly uttering the name "Krishna" (II.38). Rūpa thus links Rādhā with Krishna *bhaktas*, not only on the level of emotion, but in the realm of ritual as well, for the repeated utterance or singing of Krishna's name has been a central element in practice, both individual and communal, at least since the time of Caitanya.<sup>28</sup>

### Krishna's Devotion to Rādhā

The foregoing illustrations of Rādhā's devotion to Krishna, in which Rādhā is clearly portrayed as the ideal *bhakta*, represent only part of the picture. In the first place, for virtually every instance that I have cited, one can find a parallel passage attesting to Krishna's fervent devotion to her. We have observed above that Rādhā's single-minded concentration on Krishna is expressed in terms drawn from descriptions of yogic practice; Krishna, too, is on more than one occasion compared to a *yogī*, for he thinks incessantly upon Rādhā, losing sleep and renouncing all other enjoyments so long as he is deprived of her company.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, corresponding to Rādhā's reiterated expression of her utter inability to live without Krishna is a passage in which Krishna likewise acknowledges that he cannot live even for an instant without Rādhā (III.22), and just as Viśakhā, addressing her, refers to Krishna as "the lord of your life" (*te jīvitapati*),<sup>30</sup> so Krishna calls Rādhā a life-giving herb,<sup>31</sup> later confessing to her, "You are my life, O Rādhā!"<sup>32</sup>

Such parallel expressions of emotion clearly have profound metaphysical implications, to which we shall shortly return.

The intense preoccupation of Rādhā and Krishna with one another is indicated by another set of parallel passages with similar metaphysical overtones. So obsessed with Krishna does Rādhā become that she sees him everywhere; when she mistakes a black *tamāla* tree for her dark lover, Viśakhā asks her how it is that the three worlds have become Krishna for her.<sup>33</sup> Krishna poses the corresponding question for himself as he eagerly awaits Rādhā at their point of rendezvous: "Rādhā appears before me on every side; how is it that for me the three worlds have become Rādhā?" (V.18). Rūpa seems to have been especially taken with this mode of indicating Krishna's infatuation, for on two additional occasions he has other characters make virtually the same observation about Krishna's "delusion" (III.18; VI.23. 20-21). Moreover, it is not only Rādhā in her obsession with Krishna who is explicitly termed "mad," but also Krishna in his unbridled passion for her. At one point, as

Krishna is rushing headlong to meet her, Madhumaṅgala, steadying him, asserts that he has been "driven mad (*unmādita*) by an evil spell [uttered] by the wicked *gopīs*" (VI.14.3-4).

Just as Rādhā's devotion to Krishna at times assumes worshipful forms,<sup>34</sup> so certain of Krishna's words and actions are clearly intended to suggest modes of adoration. In their first full meeting, Krishna expresses the desire to be in the nectar of Rādhā's favor (III.43.3), using there the word *prasāda*, "grace," which has strong religious connotations. Lalitā's reply, that he may obtain her favor by serving her (*sevā*), is likewise significant, for *sevā* is the usual Vaiṣṇava term for service to the Lord. Krishna is more than willing; his verse in response enumerates the ways in which he proposes to adorn and minister to her (III.44). In the same scene, he voices his desire to serve her as a garland of cooling blue waterlilies (III.41), and subsequently, in a verse closely parallel to those of Candrāvalī and Vṛndā about his flute and the *kadamba* tree, he expresses his envy of the *raṅgaṇa* garland that has the good fortune to reside next to her bosom (III.46). Later in the play, when he tries to appease Rādhā after spending the night with Candrāvalī, he indicates his penitence by making obeisance again and again, his peacock-feather crest touching the dust.<sup>35</sup> Still later, seeing his own worshipful gestures in the world of nature, he describes to Rādhā an expanse of lotuses rippled by the breeze as "doing *ārati* to your smiling face" (v. 41).

Even in the case of the most explicitly worshipful element in Rādhā's relation to Krishna, her response to his name, there are remarkably close parallels. In Act VI, when Madhumaṅgala promises to bring the hiding Rādhā to Krishna, and gives him instead a leaf inscribed with the two syllables of her name, Krishna expresses his utter delight at this gift, in a verse (VI.24) that is strongly reminiscent of Paurṇamāsī's rapturous words about *his* name. Moreover, shortly after her verse exclaiming over Krishna's name, Paurṇamāsī speaks of Rādhā's with no less enthusiasm as she proposes to entice Krishna with its auspicious syllables (I.16.6-7).

In the light of Paurṇamāsī's devotion to Rādhā, made explicit, as we shall see below, at numerous points in the drama, this passage may reasonably be construed as signifying that Rādhā's name is sweet not only to Krishna, but also to Paurṇamāsī, and thus to Vaiṣṇava devotees as well.

### Devotion Expressed by Others

The view of Rādhā as figuring in the drama solely or even primarily as the

ideal embodiment of devotion to Krishna is further challenged by a second body of evidence: the attitudes expressed by such secondary characters as Paurṇamāsī and Vṛndā, whose responses to Rādhā as well as to Krishna show strong devotional elements. In the introductory scene in Act I, Nāndimukhī expresses envy of Paurṇamāsī's grandson Madhumaṅgala, who is privileged to enjoy Krishna's constant company. Paurṇamāsī's reply indicates that Nāndimukhī's task, to increase Rādhā's passion for Krishna, is no less a privilege, for Rādhā, Paurṇamāsī confesses, means everything to her (I.14.25). In a later conversation with Madhumaṅgala and Vṛndā, Paurṇamāsī reaffirms her deep love for Rādhā, comparing her feeling in its spontaneity and lack of motive with Rādhā's love for Krishna (V.2.10-4.4).

The devotional significance of Rādhā for Paurṇamāsī, and by extension for the devotee who sees or reads this drama, is likewise evident from Paurṇamāsī's words of gratitude to Krishna at the end of the final act. When Abhimanyu is persuaded not to take Rādhā to Mathurā, Paurṇamāsī exclaims with considerable relief that she has been spared the pain of separation from Rādhā (*rādhikāviśeṣavedanā*, VII.59.3). Her expression and the threatened separation that it reflects constitute a reversal of the situation of the *gopīs* depicted in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Lalitāmādhava*, in which it is Krishna who is taken to Mathurā and the *gopīs* who experience the anguish of separation.

Paurṇamāsī is not the only secondary character in the drama who expresses emotions toward Rādhā that are usually directed toward Krishna. The beautiful verse uttered by Vṛndā in the final act (VII.44), in which she juxtaposes Rādhā's youth with her maturity in love, represents *vātsalya* toward Rādhā that is closely parallel to Yaśodā's maternal affection for Krishna.<sup>36</sup> Nāndimukhī, too, comments tenderly on Rādhā's extreme youth, expressing wonder at Krishna's great enchanting power (*mohanatva*), which has affected even this innocent child (II.13, 11). Speaking more generally, Madhumaṅgala refers to the love (*sneha*) that all the older women hold for Rādhā (V.23, 8-9), and Jaṭilā's use of the still more inclusive epithet *gokulānandinī*, "delight of Gokula" (VII.57.4), indicates that Rādhā, like Krishna, enjoys the affection of the entire village.

### Human Emotions and Hints at Divinity

A third consideration arguing against an interpretation of Rādhā as simply a model of *bhakti* is the fact that certain ways in which she is depicted by

Rūpa mark her as no ordinary mortal. Like Krishna, she embodies elements of divinity as well as qualities that are distinctly human. Her human attributes provide points of accessibility for Vaiṣṇava devotees; references to her cosmic stature, on the other hand, place a measure of distance between her and mere human *bhaktas*. We shall examine each of these categories in turn, and then explore the significance of their coexistence in Rādhā.

In certain respects, Rādhā is even more appealingly human than Krishna. She is hesitant at first in expressing her love for him even to her two close friends, and in spite of her eagerness to meet him, she is shy in her early encounters with him.<sup>37</sup> She expresses the characteristically human apprehension that she will be found unworthy of his affection,<sup>38</sup> and she is initially horrified at the audacity of Lalitā's suggestion that she play a joke on him (III.34.7-10). Although she later displays more confidence in her own worth and corresponding boldness in her meetings with Krishna, her development in these directions is not wholly consistent, and elements of diffidence persist throughout the drama.

Rādhā is hardly ever certain of anything except her love for Krishna; indeed, she is often represented as torn between two conflicting emotions. One such conflict, explored by Rūpa in some detail, is the tension between her growing passion for Krishna and her *dharma* as a married woman (I.34; III.18). Another is the anguish of *māna*, in which she is torn between jealous anger and intense desire for reconciliation.<sup>39</sup> Krishna's verses musing over her expressions and gestures in such states of inner conflict or distress are among the most poignantly charming in the entire drama. A single illustration—Krishna's concluding reflection in the fourth act, after Rādhā and her two friends have been taken away by Mukharā—may serve to convey something of their flavor.

Now assuming a steadfast pose,  
 now showing signs of wavering,  
 One moment uttering scornful sounds,  
 the next, words of eagerness  
 Now with a look of innocence,  
 now with glance bewitching,  
 Rādhā is split in two,  
 swayed now by anger, now by love.<sup>40</sup>

Rādhā's cosmic significance is suggested largely through brief hints simi-

lar to those applying to Krishna but occurring less frequently. She is, for example, on more than one occasion addressed by the term *devī*, "goddess."<sup>41</sup> Like *deva*, its masculine counterpart, this term may simply be one of respectful address; in courtly contexts it is applied to a queen or a high-ranking lady. Its use here of a cowherdess, however, is striking, especially in the phrase *pītā pracāṇḍadevī*, "fierce golden goddess," by which Krishna addresses Rādhā when he accuses her of stealing his flute (IV.49.11). Likewise occurring in compound as part of a longer phrase is the term *devatā*, which is more commonly used of Krishna. Early in the play, Krishna refers to Rādhā as *kāntinām kuladevatā*, "the tutelary deity of radiance" (II.44). In themselves such epithets are inconclusive; taken together with other similar expressions, however, they appear to point to Rādhā's transcendence.

In addition to such explicit epithets, certain adjectives or descriptions of Rādhā may be taken as pointing beyond mere human excellence. Krishna calls her *jagadapūrvā*, "unprecedented in the world" (I.31.68), and her beauty, her love, and her qualities in general are termed *lokottara*, "extraordinary" or "transcendent" (I.13; III.21.19). Her greatness (*mahiman*; *māhātmya*)<sup>42</sup> is referred to at several points; her love in particular is designated great and said to be beyond comprehension. Her cosmic significance is suggested even more strongly by certain passages in the *Lalitāmādhava*, notably the benedictory verse of the play-within-a-play, in which her great beauty is said to conquer the three worlds (LM IV.12).

The fact that the word *rādhā* is also the name of a constellation makes it possible for Rūpa to pun on her name in a way that similarly hints at her cosmic stature. The significance of such punning is indicated most clearly in an intriguing parallel. We have already noted Paurṇamāsī's pretense at discouraging Rādhā from desiring Krishna: Paurṇamāsī tells Rādhā that one whose feet are stroked by Lakṣmī, that is, Krishna conceived as Viṣṇu, is as inaccessible to her as the moon in the sky (III.15). Earlier in the drama, Paurṇamāsī gives similar "advice" to Krishna, asking him how a mere mortal could attain "this Rādhā, who roves through the sky" (I.31.58-59). The word that she uses for sky, however, *viṣṇupada*, would allow one to understand her as asking how a mere mortal could attain one who dwells near Viṣṇu's feet. Unlike Rādhā, therefore, who is deeply distressed at Paurṇamāsī's words, Krishna is utterly nonchalant, for he perceives through their hidden meaning that Rādhā belongs to him alone. In spite of this difference, however, the uniqueness and relative inaccessibility of the object of love is brought out in both instances by Paurṇamāsī's teasing.

In several other passages, Rūpa plays in a similar manner upon the double significance of Rādhā's name; such repetition seems designed to emphasize her transcendent nature (IV.11; V.29; VI.2.29-31).

The metaphysical implications of the devotional parallels that we have noted earlier should have by now become clear. Just as Rādhā's demented state, in which she sees Krishna everywhere, perceiving nothing else in the three worlds, is a metaphysically accurate apprehension of reality—for Krishna, the Lord, is the reality behind everything in the universe—so his parallel "delusion" may be taken as veridical if Rādhā is considered to be his *śakti*,<sup>43</sup> who, with him, pervades the whole world. The conviction of Rādhā and Krishna that each is the life of the other may correspondingly be interpreted as hinting at their metaphysical equality as well as affirming their intimate interdependence. The most explicit indication of equality on one level is the third verse in Act VII, in which Rādhā and Krishna are both said to have become incarnate in Mathurā. In light of the parallels that we have just noted, this verse may be seen as an important corrective to the more exclusive emphasis on Krishna represented by the benedictory verses and the opening comments of the *sūtradhāra* in the prologue to the drama.

The strands of evidence that we have just reviewed—the many close parallels between Krishna and Rādhā that reveal his devotion to her, the tender affection and reverence for her especially on the part of the older women of the village, and the hints at her divinity—combine to support an interpretation of Rādhā as standing alongside Krishna as an object of Vaiṣṇava devotion. Yet the parallels between Rādhā and Krishna should not be over-emphasized. Although the extraordinary qualities of Rādhā's love are repeatedly remarked upon, the fact of her exclusive love for Krishna is generally seen as wholly understandable: early in the play Rādhā's two close friends ask rhetorically how the *gopīs* could love anyone else (II.9.1-2).

Rādhā's great power over him, on the other hand, is a matter of continual amazement to the others. In addition to Vṛndā's astonished exclamation over the fact that Rādhā has "conquered the unconquerable" (VII.44), there is a closely related verse by Madhumāṅgala praising Rādhā for having gently captivated with her smiles "that willful, capricious elephant among the cowherds" (VI.21). Such verses clearly presuppose an assumption of Krishna's superiority: the wonder that they express at Rādhā's feats results precisely from the fact that her victory is the reverse of what is expected. Similarly, when Krishna in Act IV acknowledges to Rādhā that he is sub-

servient to her, she retorts that he is independent, that is, subservient to no one (IV.40.1-2; cf. III.42). The obvious fact of his submission to her in love, in defiance of his *aiśvarya*, is thus wondrous to his devotees precisely because it represents a reversal of what they perceive to be metaphysical reality.

The parallels between Rādhā and Krishna are thus not precise in every respect, but they are nevertheless significant. Like Krishna's endearing "faults" and subsequent "regret," Rādhā's quality of shyness and ambivalence contribute to a sense of intimacy with her on the part of her close friends and such characters as Paurṇamāsī, Nāndīmukhī, and Vṛndā. Her uniquely beautiful and extraordinarily intense love, on the other hand, makes her an object of wonder, not only to these women, and thereby to Vaiṣṇava devotees, but also to Krishna himself. She thus exemplifies and inspires *bhakti* in others at the same time that she serves with Krishna as an object of their loving devotion.

For those Vaiṣṇavas who follow Rūpa and Jiva in regarding Rādhā as the *hlādinī śakti*<sup>44</sup> of the Lord, the parallel between Rādhā and Krishna has firm metaphysical grounding. It is these Vaiṣṇavas who would make the most of the hints at Rādhā's cosmic stature discussed above. Just as Krishna is represented as both a fallible human hero and the Lord of the universe, so for such devotees Rādhā is simultaneously model *bhakta* and supreme Goddess, earthly beloved and divine consort, shy young girl and eternal *śakti*. Unless they were *sahajiyās*,<sup>45</sup> such devotees might well consider it blasphemous to identify with Rādhā in her passion for Krishna; although her great love<sup>46</sup> cannot but serve to inspire them, she herself would likely remain for them a transcendent ideal.<sup>47</sup>

### Rādhā, Candrāvali and Human Women

We may gain a fuller picture of Rādhā's love, as Rūpa conceives it, by noting the contrast he draws between her mode of loving Krishna and that of her main rival, Candrāvali. Candrāvali's affair with Krishna gives rise to an emotional complex that Rūpa deems indispensable to the full development of Rādhā's love: her jealous anger or pique (*māna*). Candrāvali also serves as a foil for Rādhā; her manner of loving Krishna contrasts in significant ways with that of Krishna's supreme beloved.

Candrāvali's involvement with Krishna, which develops before Krishna meets Rādhā, is alluded to by Paurṇamāsī, the kind, elderly go-between,



and her granddaughter Nāndimukhī, in the drama's first act. Candrāvalī seems to be older than Rādhā, and her relation to Krishna's new beloved parallels that of the older queen to the beautiful young arrival in the classical *nāṭikā*.<sup>48</sup> In Rūpa's *Lalitāmādhava*, the sequel to his *Vidagdhamādhava*, Candrāvalī appears in Dvārakā as Rukmiṇī, who marries Krishna first, before his marriage to Satyabhāmā-Rādhā.

The most distinctive quality of Candrāvalī's love for Krishna, as Rūpa portrays it, is her respect (*ādhara*).<sup>49</sup> Her deferential attitude is indicated by her use of the term *deva*, "lord," in speaking to him (IV.12.1); she is, however, also capable of addressing him sarcastically with one of his more common epithets, *gokulānanda*, "joy of Gokula" (IV.12.7), as well as with one of her own choosing, *dānaśauṇḍa*, "one who is intoxicated with giving," "man of great generosity" (IV.9.7). Moreover, her deference does not prevent her from calling him "fickle." Yet in spite of being deeply hurt by Krishna's neglect and more than a little jealous of Rādhā, she manifests her resentment verbally only through such sarcasm and mild reproach. Her show of politeness, beneath which she conceals her true feelings, finally becomes so intolerable to Krishna that he expresses his preference for "the sweet wine of [her] angry words" over "this poison of respect."<sup>50</sup> Although she is capable of leaving Krishna out of anger, she does so under a pretense, and her submissiveness is evident from the ease with which she is again reconciled with him. Padmā characterizes her well when she tells Madhumaṅgala, as they set out to find her and bring her to Krishna, that Candrāvalī is always quick to get over her anger. (IV.16.1-2).

It is in this dimension that the contrast between Candrāvalī and Rādhā is most marked. Unlike Candrāvalī, who is easily appeased, Rādhā persists in her *māna*. It is true that, left alone, she regrets not having accepted Krishna's apology; moreover, so great is her fear of rejection that she believes a false message, which describes him as having found diversion elsewhere, and she is elated to learn that he has to the contrary been pining for her. Yet she is not immediately appeased when he subsequently entreats her in person; echoing Lalitā's words of censure, she tearfully accuses him of crookedness. Her willingness thus to express her emotions openly contrasts with Candrāvalī's ironic apology to Krishna for the offense of speaking to him audaciously (*pragalbham*, IV.12.8). In the light of Candrāvalī's greater docility, we may discern a measure of truth in Lalitā's teasing verse in Act VII, in which she compares Krishna to a male elephant, followed by Candrāvalī but pursuing Rādhā (VII.21). Krishna himself

underscores the contrast between them: when Candrāvalī is brought to him not long after her peevish departure, he says that she is attained quickly (*añjasā*, IV.19), whereas he describes Rādhā, as he awaits her, with the words *bhṛṣam abhisaranī sarabhasam*, “coming with intensity and passion to the tryst” (v.19).

The foregoing incidents exemplify an important theoretical distinction elaborated by Rūpa in his *Ujvalanīlamanī*. In the context of enumerating the increasingly intense stages in the development of the *sthāyibhāva* or permanent emotion of *madhura bhaktirasa*,<sup>51</sup> Rūpa establishes certain categories in terms of which he contrasts Candrāvalī’s love for Krishna with that of Rādhā. After a general discussion of love’s basic form, which he terms *prema*, he classifies *sneha*, the second stage of this erotic emotion, into two types, *gṛtasneha* (love that is like clarified butter) and *madhusneha* (love that is like honey). *Gṛtasneha* is *ātyantikādaramaya*, made of excessive respect (*ādara*); Rūpa explains that it is so named because it is not relishable alone, but only in combination with another emotion, as clarified butter is enjoyed only when it is mixed with other foods. Carrying the analogy further, he asserts that just as clarified butter hardens when it cools, so this type of *sneha* becomes solidified through mutual respect, which, according to Rūpa, is an extremely cool emotion.<sup>52</sup>

*Madhusneha*, by contrast, consists of an abundance of *madīyatva* (a sense of possessing the beloved). The commentators<sup>53</sup> explain that in this form of love the conception “he is mine” predominates, and from Rūpa’s use of the term *madīyatva* here they infer that *gṛtasneha* must be characterized by a predominance of *tadīyatva*, that is, by the contrary apprehension “I am his.” *Madīyatva* clearly reveals a higher degree of confidence than *tadīyatva*, which expresses greater subservience. The name *madhu*, Rūpa explains, is given to this form of *sneha* because like honey it is in itself sweet, needing nothing else to make it so, and it unites many *rasas*, as honey unites the essence of various flowers.<sup>54</sup>

From these theological-aesthetic distinctions we can discern certain of Rūpa’s preferences. Although he holds both Rādhā and Candrāvalī in high esteem, classifying each of them as *yūtheśvarī* (a “queen” presiding over a group of *gopīs*), he clearly values Rādhā’s boldly expressive, willful mode of loving Krishna above Candrāvalī’s more reticent, docile manner. Indeed, he attributes this strong preference to Krishna himself.<sup>55</sup> His partiality for Rādhā’s more spontaneous love, with its relative lack of restraint and its sportive humor, is an extension of Rūpa’s more general preference for

*mādhurya* over *aiśvarya*,<sup>56</sup> and for intimate relational modes in which the awareness of Krishna's lordship is largely or wholly subordinate to that of his sweet charm.

As we have seen, the demeanor of Rādhā and Candrāvali in the *Vidagdhamādhava* accords rather well with the differences between them that Rūpa details in his *Uj्jvalanīlamāṇi*. Rūpa maintains further that there is a correspondence between the quality of Krishna's love for each *gopī* and that of her love for him.<sup>57</sup> Krishna is thus free to be more spontaneous and expressive with Rādhā, whereas he is constrained in his love for Candrāvali by their deep mutual respect. Krishna's actions in the *Vidagdhamādhava* are in conformity with this statement in Rūpa's theory: the stage directions specify that he should approach Candrāvali with respect (*ādara*, IV.7.2), and in his conversations with her he is considerably more subdued than when talking with Rādhā and her friends.

The question of the devotional significance of these distinctions, and of the figure of Candrāvali, is a difficult but important one. How does Rūpa expect individual Vaiṣṇava devotees to relate to Candrāvali and to her love for Krishna? If, apart from her role as jealous rival, she serves chiefly as a foil for Rādhā, are they to view her love primarily as a negative example? Does it serve merely to highlight the uniqueness of Rādhā's love? Or may devotees of a certain temperament, to whom such respect is congenial, find in her mode of loving Krishna a direct inspiration for their own devotion?

Arguing against the view of Candrāvali's love as solely a negative example is the fact that Rūpa regards her as one of the foremost *gopīs*, and he considers the *gopīs* as a group to embody the highest form of love for Krishna, contrasting them, for example, with Krishna's queens in Dvārakā. Yet both in his dramas and in the *Uj्jvalanīlamāṇi* he singles out Rādhā's love for special attention. Devotees are clearly meant to take inspiration from its marvelous qualities, to share the wonder of such characters as Paurṇamāsī and Nāndimukhī at its depth and its unexpected reversals. Because the drama's characters do not express corresponding wonder at Candrāvali's love, it seems clear that her love for Krishna, however exalted, does not inspire comparable admiration. Unlike Rādhā, she has not become the object of Vaiṣṇava devotion. It is noteworthy that the eighteenth-century commentator Viśvanātha Cakravartī uses the honorific prefix *śrī* in referring to Rādhā, as he does for Krishna, whereas he does not use it to refer to Candrāvali.<sup>58</sup>

We have noted earlier that Rūpa uses explicitly theological language in reference to Rādhā. In designating her Krishna's *hlādinī śakti*, most signifi-

cantly, he affirms her co-divinity with Krishna. Such a designation, by emphasizing her transcendence, contrasts with the warm humanness of her portrayal in the *Vidagdhamādhava*. It would thus seem to decrease the likelihood that Rādhā could serve as an accessible model of a strong, defiant woman.

The issue of Rādhā's divinity and the diverse ways she has been viewed by mortal women has important contemporary as well as historical implications. Some of my recent research confirms—at least for the last few years of the twentieth century—my expectation that there would be a spectrum of views, especially among women, on the issue of Rādhā's suitability as a model for women in ordinary social interactions. Two male performers I interviewed were insistent on sharply differentiating Rādhā from human women.<sup>59</sup> However, when my research assistants and I asked a number of women attending a *kīrtan* performance<sup>60</sup> whether a woman whose husband is unfaithful to her should rebuke him in the way that Rādhā rebukes Krishna, they gave widely differing answers. Some said that the wife of a man who has slept with another woman should indeed reproach him, as Rādhā reproaches Krishna in comparable circumstances;<sup>61</sup> others advocated understanding and forgiveness as ways to bring the husband around; still others strenuously objected in principle to the comparison, saying that Rādhā is a goddess, and therefore she must never be compared with mortal women.

### Conclusion

Our exploration of Rūpa's vision of Rādhā, as he sets it forth in his *Vidagdhamādhava*, provides important clues to her historical development and evolving religious significance. For greater Bengal, we can compare Rūpa's portrayal with those found in other devotional works, notably Jayadeva's *Gītāgovinda*, the *padāvalī* of Caṇḍidās, Vidyāpati, and others, and the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* of Baḍu Caṇḍidās. When we also juxtapose it with such performance forms as *padāvalī kīrtan*, we find further striking continuities. Here we can suggest only a few of these.

Although Rūpa's Rādhā has certain qualities in common with the Rādhā of Jayadeva's lyrical poem, especially in the expressions of her jealous anger, Jayadeva's heroine has not one, but an entire cohort of rivals: all the other *gopīs*. A closer parallel to Rūpa's heroine is Rādhā as she is represented in the medieval Bengali lyrics of Caṇḍidās,<sup>62</sup> who, like Rūpa, emphasizes

her marriage and the ensuing struggles with her in-laws. The depiction of Rādhā by singers of *padāvalī kīrtan* such as Nanda Kishor Das likewise appears to be broadly in harmony with Rūpa's view of her.<sup>63</sup>

From an examination of the Vaiṣṇava *padāvalī* and the manner in which they have continued to be performed in *kīrtan* right down to the twenty-first century, it is clear that *kīrtan* singers and other oral performers and expositors—rather than texts—have been the chief means through which this rich narrative and lyric tradition has been maintained and transmitted. Somewhat surprisingly, then, the vision of Rādhā expressed by Rūpa Gosvāmī in erudite treatises and difficult Sanskrit plays has been enshrined, preserved, and communicated both widely and with remarkable faithfulness in several genres of devotional performance,<sup>64</sup> most notably, *padāvalī kīrtan*. Thus on closer inspection the Sanskrit/vernacular and elite/popular dichotomies with which we began our reflections on Rūpa's play effectively collapse, and we are afforded new insight into a complex religious tradition with impressive continuity through time and across social boundaries.

#### ENDNOTES

1. The body of this article is a slightly revised version of Chapter VI and part of Chapter VII from my *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization: The Vidagdhamādhava of Rūpa Gosvāmī* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984). I would like to thank Scholars Press for their permission to reprint this material. The pun (Sanskrit, *śleṣa*) is classified as a figure of speech in Sanskrit poetics.

2. The term Gauḍiya, "of Gauda, i.e., Bengal" is essentially synonymous with the term Bengali, if Bengali is taken to designate a region rather than a language or a culture. The Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava movement has not, however, been limited to greater Bengal; the community has also maintained a significant presence in Vrindāvan.

3. On the immense influence of the works of Rūpa, his brother Sanātana, and their nephew Jiva on subsequent doctrinal developments in the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava community, see S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, Second Edition (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961) (VFM), pp. 103-19; and Ramakanta Chakrabarty, *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal, 1486-1900* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985), pp. 62-66.

4. For detailed summaries of these two works, see De, VFM, pp. 166-224.

5. A new, highly scholarly translation and edition of this work is scheduled to appear this year: *The Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, translated by Edward C. Dimock, edited by Tony K. Stewart, with an introduction and notes by Dimock and Stewart (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 56, 2000). I am grate-

ful to Edward Dimock for his note of clarification in response to my questions about Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's magnum opus.

6. On *padāvalī kīrtan* and the ways in which Rādhā is represented in it, see Wulff, "Rādhā, Consort and Conqueror of Krishna," in John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff, eds., *Devi: Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 124-30.

7. *Kīrtan* singers represent a broad spectrum in the extent of their knowledge, training, and ability. On the late Nanda Kishor Das, a highly trained and immensely gifted *kīrtanīyā*, see Wulff, "The Theology of a Lover's Quarrel," in *The Banyan Tree: Essays on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), esp. pp. 183-90. There are also enormous differences among listeners in their knowledge and appreciation of *kīrtan*.

8. It is classed as a *nāṭaka*, a heroic drama, as are two of Kālidāsa's plays. See Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *Theater of Memory: The Plays of Kālidāsa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 43-5.

9. Rūpa was clearly drawing on narratives and poetry that he inherited, especially the *Gītāgovinda* and the lyrics of Caṇḍīdās and Vidyāpati.

10. I., translated in Wulff, *Drama*, p. 36. Cf. I.6, in which Rūpa describes his play as composed of the *guṇas* of Hari.

11. When they are mentioned, it is often in general terms. In IV.21, for example, the purpose of Lalitā's enumeration of the adornments that Rādhā has put on wrong is not to describe Rādhā's physical appearance per se, but to reveal her confused emotional state as she prepares to meet Krishna. Cf. VII.47, which serves primarily to reveal Krishna's feelings.

12. E.g., I.33; IV.22.

13. Such comparisons occur throughout the play, e.g., at V.14, VI.25, VI.31.4, and VII.55. The superiority of Rādhā's face is declared in V.20, V.49, and VI.14. Straightforward similes are instances of an extremely common Sanskrit figure of speech termed *upamā*; those in which Rādhā surpasses the term of comparison are examples of the figure known as *atiśayokti*. See Edwin Gerow, *A Glossary of Indian Figures of Speech* (The Hague: Edwin Mouton, 1971).

14. Described by Krishna in II.51 and VI.17 and by others in III.42, VI.17, and VI.22. In each instance it is the effect of Rādhā's grace and coquetry on Krishna that is the main point of the passage. Like Krishna's beauty, therefore, Rādhā's loveliness is significant largely because of its power.

15. It is significant that this term and such closely related words for sweetness as *madhuriman* and *mādhurya*, which are often used in reference to Krishna, are here and elsewhere used of Rādhā, especially by Krishna (II.30.3, 45.1; IV.15, 46; LM I.54).

16. II.31.4 In the general verse that he gives in support of his inference, Krishna uses the phrase *paramo 'nubhāva*, "supreme greatness."

17. Cf. III.49, in which it is Rādhā's love that is said to adorn her.

18. Viśākhā at III.12.1-2 refers to her *rāgasya garīman*, "the greatness of [her] redness/love," by which even Śyāmasundara ("the beautiful black one") is made red/loving (*rakta*).
19. See I.14.27-28 for Nāndimukhī's description of the signs of Rādhā's intense emotion, which she terms *atibhūmim gata*, "become exceedingly great."
20. *vātula*, II.11; cf. II.5. In seeing Krishna everywhere, Rādhā is perceiving meta-physical truth.
21. Rādhā uses the word *durūha*, "hard to comprehend" (II.1.8; cf. II.4) and Paurṇamāsī uses the synonymous term *durvibodha* (II.16.3) and *durgama* (II.17.2). In II.18, Paurṇamāsī maintains that only one who has experienced such love for Krishna "knows its torturous and sweet steps."
22. I.16. The fact that the *prema* of Rādhā and the other *gopīs* for Krishna arises naturally is of crucial importance for Rūpa. Nāndimukhī reiterates the point immediately, using the term *svabhāvika*, "innate, natural," with specific reference to Rādhā's love. She proceeds to qualify that statement somewhat, however, pointing out that the cleverness of Rādhā's friends serves as an excitant (*uddīpanam*). For the use of the term *sahaja* among *sahajiyā* Vaiṣṇavas, see Dimock (*The Place of the Hidden Moon*, pp. 35-36, 42).
23. Translated in Wulff, *Drama*, p. 114.
24. VI.21. The last two words of the verse, *jagad viśmṛtam*, "the world forgotten," succinctly express a central goal of yoga, total obliviousness to the mundane world.
25. II.47.9. The stage directions (II.47.10) instruct the actor or actress to enact *dhyāna* (meditation). *Dhyāna* is a central term in yoga. See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, second edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 71-73.
26. II.47. The *tamāla* is black, like Krishna, as is thus closely associated with him. Rādhā's wish presupposes the conventional imagery of classical Sanskrit poetry, in which the (female) creeper and the (male) tree around which it is entwined represent the loving couple.
27. III.16. Cf. III.41 for the expression of a parallel desire by Krishna.
28. In his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (I.2.32-34), Rūpa lists three activities connected with the name of the Lord among the *aṅgas* (limbs) of Vaidhī-bhakti: *japa* (repeated utterance), *gīta* (singing), and *saṅkīrtan* (communal chanting). See Norvin Hein, "Caitanya's Ecstasies and the Theology of the Name," in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976).
29. III.4; III.8.14-15; V.14; Cf. II.24.
30. II.48. The terms *jīvītapati* and the virtually synonymous *prāṇanātha* are reminiscent of several of the names of Viṣṇu enumerated, for example, at *Mahābhārata* 13.149, notably *jīvana*, *prāṇa*, *prāṇadā*, and *prāṇabhṛt* (Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, p. 18). In the *Vidagdhamādhava*, however, such terms assume a new significance, for the context is not a metaphysical one but an emotional one of love and longing.
31. II.46.1. At *Lalitāmādhava* (LM) IV.34.1, Mādhava (Krishna in the play-within-a-play) likewise refers to Rādhā as a life-giving herb (*jīvītauśadhi*); and a closely paral-



lel expression by Rādhā is found at LM III.25, in which she refers to Krishna as *jīvarakṣauṣadhinidhi*, the repository of the herbs that sustain life.

32. *prāṇās tvam asi rādhike*, V.31. Cf. VI.18.14, in which Krishna, punning on another name for the *bandhūka* flowers that Rādhā has picked, asks Rādhā how she can leave, taking the life of (her) friend, i.e., his life (*āhṛtabandhujivā*).

33. VI.8.44. Viśākhā here calls Rādhā *premodbhṛānte*, "you who are mad with love." Paradoxically, it is this "demented" condition that allows her to perceive metaphysical truth.

34. Cf. LM II.33.3, in which Mukharā (or Lalitā in the Kāvyamālā edition of the *Vidagdhamādhava*) punning on Rādhā's name, says to Krishna after his valiant slaying of Śaṅkhacūḍā, "O hero, fortunately your worshipper (*ārādhikā*) has been saved."

35. IV.46; the description is Krishna's own. See VI.20.53-55: Madhumaṅgala there playfully interprets the nocturnal vigil that he and Krishna keep, while waiting for Rādhā, as a form of worship (*upāsana*).

36. See I.20.6-7. In *Lalitāmādhava*, Yaśodā herself expresses *vātsalya* toward Rādhā, whom she terms *vatsā laghvī*, "my dear little child," comparing her to Krishna in the delight that seeing her gives. Paurṇamāsī replies that all the inhabitants of Gokula feel a comparable delight (LM I.42.15-19).

37. At Rādhā's first tryst, Viśākhā, addressing Krishna, characterizes her as the goddess Shyness herself incarnate (III.40.1-2).

38. Compare Rādhā's own words at V.7 with Krishna's description of the expressions of her conflicting feelings in IV.51, translated below.

39. IV.51. The term that I translate "love" is *praṇaya*, the comfortable affection of long familiarity. Rādhikā is a diminutive employed frequently throughout the drama; I use it here for metrical purposes. Cf. V.44 and VII.50, in which Krishna describes in turn Rādhā's agitation and her anger, both of which render her still more beautiful in his eyes.

40. E.g., by Madhmaṅgala at VI.20.50.

41. Both in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (e.g., at X.35.12) and in Rūpa's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (e.g., at I.2.79), the *gopīs* are referred to as *vrajadēvyāḥ*, "queens/goddesses of Vraja." Thus, the use of the term *devī* in relation to Rādhā is not in itself sufficient to set her apart from the other *gopīs*.

42. *Mahiman* is used by Krishna at II.31.4. At III.12.1, Viśākhā, responding to Rādhā's expression of anguish, addresses her as *avijñātanijamāhātmya*, "you who fail to recognize your own greatness."

43. On the terms *śakti* and *hlādinī śakti*, see Wulff, *Drama*, Chapter I, n. 43.

44. On Rādhā as Krishna's *hlādinī śakti*, see S.K. De, *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, second edition (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1961), pp. 279-81.

45. On *sahajīyā* Vaiṣṇavas, see Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, op. cit.

46. In the *Ujvalanilamanī*, Rādhā's love is termed *mahābhāva*, "great emotion."

47. A revised form of the chapter on Rādhā in Wulff, *Drama*, based on further study of the *Lalitāmādhava*, is found in John Stratton Hawley and Donna M. Wulff, eds.,



*The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982), pp. 27-41. The six essays on Rādhā from that volume, together with four new essays, will form a new volume entirely on Rādhā, which I am currently editing.

48. E.g., that of Vāsavadattā to Sāgarikā in Harṣa's *Ratnāvalī*.

49. See Wulff, *Drama*, Chapter III, n. 39. Rūpa's emphasis on Candrāvalī's *ādara* may be seen most clearly from his discussion of *gr̥tasneha* in the *Uj̥jvalanīlamāṇi* (see below), in which he uses the term four times in three verses, twice qualifying it with adjectives that mean great or deep. In the third of these verses he describes *ādara* as arising from *gaurava*, "respect," a term that the commentators explain as a sense of Krishna's greatness.

50. IV.12.5-6. A recent expression of a similar sentiment is found in the *pravacan* of a *līlā* enacted in Vrindāvan. There Krishna explains that although he has many names, one in particular is especially dear to his heart: *mākhan cor*, "butter thief." The reason for his choice is not far to seek: other names presuppose respect and thus distance, whereas an insult like *mākhan cor* necessarily signifies intimacy. See J. S. Hawley, *Krishna, the Butter Thief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 184-86.

51. *Madhura bhaktirasa* is Rūpa's designation for the unique form of erotic love that exists between the *gopīs*, especially Rādhā, and Krishna. See Wulff, *Drama*, p. 28.

52. *Uj̥jvalanīlamāṇi, sthāyibhāva-prakaraṇam*, pp. 79-83.

53. Jiva Gosvāmi and Viśvanātha Cakravartī.

54. *Uj̥jvalanīlamāṇi, sthāyibhāva-prakaraṇam*, pp. 84-85.

55. *Uj̥jvalanīlamāṇi, yūteśvaribhedāḥ*, p. 56.

56. Sweet charm over lordly majesty; see Wulff, *Drama*, pp. 99, 109-17.

57. *Uj̥jvalanīlamāṇi, sthāyibhāva-prakaraṇam*, p. 56.

58. E.g., in his commentary on *Uj̥jvalanīlamāṇi, sthāyibhāva-prakaraṇam*, p. 82.

59. *Kīrtan* singers perform songs with lyrics based on the Vaiṣṇava *padāvalī*. See Wulff, "Lover's Quarrel," pp. 191-5, and "Internal Interpretation: The *ākhar* Lines in Performances of *padāvalī kīrtan*," in *Contacts Between Cultures: South Asia* (Vol. 2), ed. K.I. Koppedrayar (Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 317-24.

60. The interviews were conducted at Triangular Park, in south Calcutta, during the annual Gītajayanti Festival.

61. The circumstances are not wholly identical, for Rādhā's relation with Krishna is usually considered *parakīyā*, love outside the confines of marriage. In the *Vidagdha-mādhava*, Rūpa creates an outwardly *parakīyā* scenario, but he maintains in the *Uj̥jvalanīlamāṇi* that Rādhā is Krishna's eternal consort. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition has consistently warned against imitating Rādhā and Krishna's love in the realm of earthly liaisons.

62. Baḍu Caṇḍidās, far more than Dvija Caṇḍidās. On the several poets who wrote

under this name, see Sukumar Sen, *Chandidas* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1971).

63. Wulff, "Lover's Quarrel," pp. 190-7.

64. Others are *Bhāgavat Pāṭh*, *Kathakatā*, and *Kaviṅgān*.

### Appendix One: Dramatis Personae

Abhimanyu = Husband of Rādhā (through the illusion created by Yogamāyā).

Candrāvalī = Senior rival of Rādhā; wife of Govardhana.

Jaṭilā = Elderly mother of Abhimanyu; mother-in-law of Rādhā.

Lalitā = Girlfriend of Rādhā.

Madhumaṅgala = *Brāhmaṇa* friend and confidante to Krishna.

Mukharā = Maternal grandmother of Rādhā.

Nāndimukhi = Granddaughter and assistant to Paurṇamāsī.

Padmā = Girlfriend of Candrāvalī.

Paurṇamāsī = Saintly go-between; grandmother of Madhumaṅgala.

Viśākhā = Girlfriend of Rādhā.

Vṛndā = Goddess of the forest Vrindāvan, which she beautifies for Krishna.

Yaśodā = Foster mother of Krishna.

READING, WRITING, AND RECLAIMING:  
BHAKTIVINODA THAKURA AND THE  
MODERNIZATION OF GAUDIYA VAISHNAVISM

Jason D. Fuller

Babai is a very young Bengali child.<sup>1</sup> For the first few years of his life he has lived in adolescent bliss with his extended family in Calcutta. He is especially fond of his paternal aunt (*piśi*) whom he loves dearly. Each day, they play together and sing for hours and hours. There is no one in the world more important to Babai than his adored aunt.

One day Babai learns some disturbing news. He is informed that his beloved aunt will soon be leaving his household. She is to be married to a Calcutta gentleman and she will be moving away. Babai is not at all pleased with the news. After meeting the new uncle and spending time with him, Babai explains to his parents what bothers him most about the intrusive figure: "This uncle of mine lounges around all day. He does nothing. He just lies there and reads books. And how does he read? He doesn't *really* read! He opens books and silently stares at them!"<sup>2</sup>

Babai's incredulity is understandable. For the young boy, still learning to read himself, reading is not properly a matter of eyes darting across a page, lips remaining still. In his experience, it is not a solitary act. It is, rather, a matter of speaking, listening, and performing. In school Babai has been taught to read and recite aloud. In the religious ceremonies and puranic recitation sessions that he has attended with his family, the religious functionary (*kathak* or *pathak*)—whether in Sanskrit or Bengali—reads aloud, verbalizes, and the audience listens. In Babai's experience reading (*pada*) implies listening (*sona*). The two activities go hand in hand.

So, too, this peculiar uncle's habit of lounging around all day and spending endless hours staring at pages in books seems especially odd to Babai. In the young boy's limited experience, the acquisition of book-knowledge and the enjoyment of literary entertainment are affairs of the eyes and ears, public events where the mediation of thought and experi-

ence are carried out in the living presence of community. What Babai finds most frustrating about his uncle is that he simply lies around all day, defiantly unproductive, engaged in an unabashedly anti-social activity.

Babai is right to feel threatened by his new uncle's strange behavior. As Babai correctly intuitu, something strange is afoot with this new uncle. The silently absorbed uncle represents not only a threat to Babai's daily routine with his *pisi*, but to something much more fundamental. The uncle both represents and foreshadows a transformation that is about to take place in Babai's own life as he learns to read more proficiently. Soon, Babai too will be expected to spend countless hours staring at the pages of a book, sitting utterly still, absorbed in another universe of significance and meaning enjoyed only by the solitary reader.

The story of Babai comes from the Bengali social historian Gautam Bhadra who recounts the details of his initial encounters with a prospective nephew (Babai) in the 1980s. In his well-known essay, "Kathakatar Nana Katha" Bhadra argues that a shift in Bengali reading habits occurred under British rule, the repercussions of which are still felt today. Bhadra argues that prior to the nineteenth century Bengalis engaged written materials primarily through the auspices of a *pathak* or bard who would read narratives aloud to large audiences. The custom of *patha* or "reading aloud" was a Bengali tradition that dated back many hundreds (if not thousands) of years. The tradition was especially significant for Vaishnavas who would go to hear manuscripts of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, and the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* read aloud by Brahmin *pathaks*. Traditionally the hosting of an *asara* or meeting for the recitation of scripture was a popular custom among the wealthy classes. *Pathaks* would read themselves and then encourage others to read too. But in all cases the manuscript was revered as a sacred object. Before and after a recitation session it was compulsory for the Brahmin *pathak* to invoke the grace (*vandana*) of the manuscript.<sup>3</sup> Bhadra points out that this tradition continued into the nineteenth century. He argues that "even some low caste people of Bengal during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could read. . . . Still they preferred to organize the hiring of a Brahmin *pathak*. They would rather listen than read privately. . . . Bengalis have always understood that listening to a piece read aloud produces a different feeling than solitary reading."<sup>4</sup>

In the latter half of the nineteenth century a shift in attitude toward reading swept through the Bengali intelligentsia. Although the older tradi-

tions continued to live on side by side with the new dispensation, a new attitude toward reading developed among the educated classes. The British educated *bhadralok* or *babu* class emerged in the nineteenth century and they brought with them new understandings of books and reading. For the *bhadralok*, reading was a daily activity that was to be performed in silence for the purposes of edification and education. It was not first and foremost a communal or audible affair. As Manmohan Basu pointed out in his nineteenth century diary: "These *babus* of today have no idea what it means to read aloud."<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the switch from a culture of public recitation to one of private reading marked a dramatic transformation of the Bengali cultural landscape. Bhadra explains the distinctions: "One who *listens* has reality or truth presented to him or her. The narrative stands alive in the hearing. The world of the narrative proceeds outward into the audience when it is encountered through listening. In the task of reading aloud, the *pathak* exists in the midst of listeners. Here the form of *patha* is plural. Conversely, one can read seated in a library, in which case communication is addressed to the solitary self. It is a purely mental activity. Maintaining silence is the rule in every library. Thousands read there yet there is no sound. In libraries readers are individuals. Their area of study is exclusive and private. What one chooses to read is totally different from what others are reading. The connection of the reader to the manuscript or book is unaccompanied, solitary."<sup>6</sup>

One can understand Babai's frustration with his lazy, reading, uncle. The new uncle represents a threat to a way of life that Babai has come to recognize as "traditional." Call it what you will, modernity, the new dispensation, westernization, or colonization—the issue is the same. Babai's uncle's behavior is indicative of a rupture within Bengali society that continues to manifest itself nearly two hundred years after the explosion of print capitalism in eastern India.<sup>7</sup> Through his peculiar mode of reading as much as his indolence the uncle sets himself off as an anomaly—neither "western" nor "native," and yet somehow both; through his reading habits he distinguishes himself as a member of the middle or *bhadralok* class.<sup>8</sup>

About the typical Bengali *bhadralok* male in the latter half of the nineteenth century the pseudonymous author, A. Hindustani, wrote in *The Bengal Magazine* (1873): "He knows a great deal more, commands a wider range of vision and thought, speaks more powerfully, and acts more intelligently than his countrymen, and there is a gulf, though not impassable,

between the nation [indigenous population] and the community [class] to which he belongs . . . [He is distinguished by] his dress, his food, his mode of living in private, his mode of speaking in public and that consequential air which he maintains amid the denunciations of his friends and foes."<sup>9</sup> Babai's uncle is a legatee of that original *bhadralok* class that emerged within Bengali society in the nineteenth century.

The newly emerging colonial middle-class in the nineteenth century inhabited a contradictory location within a class position.<sup>10</sup> Sandwiched between the British rulers and the subaltern masses the *bhadralok*—literally: gentle/civilized/proper (*bhadra*), people (*lok*)—were in many important ways, defined by their “middle-ness.” They were mediators and translators in a colonial system of domination, at once subordinate to the foreign ruling elite while at the same time dominant vis-à-vis the mass of the indigenous population. Bureaucrats, teachers and petty merchants, they were discernible by their mastery of and participation in the colonial public sphere. Educated, through the medium of English, to a very advanced level in math, science, philosophy, civil procedure and literature, the members of the emerging middle-class became apparatchiks in the expansive colonial system of revenue extraction. As a consequence of the imposition and rapid deployment of print culture and western education, the *bhadralok* valued books and book-learning to an unprecedented degree by the second-half of the nineteenth century. As the social historian Sumit Sarkar notes:

The sudden entry of print culture and Western education, along with the creative indigenous response to them; through vernacular prose, valorized book-learning to an unprecedented extent among the colonial middle class of nineteenth-century Bengal. Sacred Hindu texts became widely available in written form for the first time, and printed matter became far more accessible than manuscripts could ever have been. Higher education, now being made indispensable for respectable jobs and professions, was imparted through a foreign language, far removed from everyday speech, which could be learnt only through books.<sup>11</sup>

The *bhadralok* were, indeed, quite comfortable with—and as Babai would have it, maybe even defined by—the habit of reading; just reading.

In this they were successful in fulfilling an aspiration of the early British missionaries who, as far back as the 1820s, had been scheming about ways to instill a “love of reading” in the “natives.”<sup>12</sup> The idea was that, by cultivating the press, India could be lifted out of her millennial slumber and

helped along the path of "improvement." The British missionaries thought that the acquisition of the skills of solitary reading and study would lead to improved reasoning abilities, a greater command of modern science, the removal of superstition and thus, ultimately, to Christianity. In 1821 an editor for the *Friend of India* wrote: "The great benefit which the nations of Europe have derived from the press, must render every philanthropic mind desirous that it should be introduced to the same extent among those nations who are yet held in the fetters of ignorance and superstition."<sup>13</sup>

But if, from roughly 1800 through the 1860s, the Christian missionaries saw in the habit of reading a path to Protestantism and the colonial government saw in it a path to vocational prowess, by the 1870s many among the *bhadralok* class saw in reading and the printing press something quite different. Still stinging from the fallout of the rebellion of 1857, the educated classes in the 1870s and 1880s saw in it a potential that could not have been fully anticipated by the colonial proponents of development and reform. Many post-mutiny *bhadralok* activists saw in the printing press a means by which "national" and "indigenous" traditions could be rejuvenated and revitalized. Reading—and correspondingly writing—for them represented not simply a passive acceptance of colonial models and structures but rather served as the very means by which these structures could be subverted and challenged. Though reading and printing were in large part imposed disciplines, they could be reconfigured and redirected to accomplish specifically Bengali or nationalist goals.<sup>14</sup> Through the reclamation of indigenous traditions the *bhadralok* sought to forge an independent trajectory of modernization at once consonant with the best that the West had to offer (i.e., technology, technique) while at the same time undeniably indigenous and unique in form and function. Reading and print culture became sites of both complicity and contestation for the *bhadralok* who sought to negotiate the tensions and contradictions inherent in a worldview that had accepted the authority and legitimacy of British emphases upon reading and literacy while at the same time rejecting *what* was to be read and *how* it was to be understood. One of the most important consequences of this contradiction was the nationalist attempt to apply so-called "modern" techniques to the recovery of indigenous traditions.

In the latter three decades of the nineteenth century the drive to recover and legitimize "lost" traditions had caught the eye of even the myopic English newspaper editors. In the 1890s an editor of *The Hindu* in Madras wrote: "We have observed of late a tendency on the part of some of our

educated countrymen to apply their mental powers for irrationally reactionary purposes. Social customs and institutions which are evil in their results, and are the product of past simpler and less civilized conditions, have received elaborate defence; and even certain merits have been attached to them."<sup>15</sup> Chief among the recovery techniques deployed in this regard was print technology and foremost among the "evil" institutions that were being reclaimed was Hinduism.

Although Hindu reformation and revitalization movements have been considered by scholars, what has rarely been considered is the role of print, and more specifically the impact of "reading" on these movements.<sup>16</sup> It is my contention that in the process of recovering Hindu traditions through the medium of the press, the traditions were themselves transformed.

One of the most interesting examples of the use of print culture to reclaim an indigenous tradition was the attempt of certain intellectuals, from the 1870s through the early 1900s, to recover Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Bengal. In the following I examine a few areas where new habits of reading and the rise of print culture may have had an impact on Gaudiya Vaishnava devotional behavior in the late nineteenth century. As a unique case study in the utilization of print capitalism to reinvigorate an indigenous religious tradition, the reclamation of Gaudiya Vaishnavism tells us something about the transformation of Vaishnavism in the 1880s and 1890s, as well as the fascinating tensions and contradictions inherent in *bhadralok* life in the latter half of the nineteenth century. A discussion of the recovery of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in colonial Bengal opens a window onto a key facet of *bhadralok* social life at a critical historical moment.

### **Bhaktivinoda Thakura and the Emergence of Vaishnava Print Culture**

When considering the impact of print culture on the revitalization of indigenous religious traditions in nineteenth-century Bengal, the name of Bhaktivinoda Thakura comes immediately to mind. The intellectual and material efforts that Bhaktivinoda put into the reclamation and promulgation of an embattled Gaudiya Vaishnavism in colonial Bengal are well known.<sup>17</sup> Bhaktivinoda Thakura was a high-ranking colonial civil servant who published dozens of books and tracts relating to Gaudiya Vaishnavism from the 1860s through the 1890s. Over the course of his publishing career he attracted the attention of thousands of Bengali intellectuals with Vaishnava best-sellers like the *Sri Krishna Samhita*, *Sri Chaitanya Siksamrita*,



*Jaiva Dharma*, and *Prema Pradīpa*. In the *Krishna Samhita* and the *Chaitanya Siksamrita* he laid out the philosophical case for the legitimacy of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition contra the western inspired criticisms of both colonial missionaries and indigenous rationalist reformers.<sup>18</sup> In *Jaiva Dharma* and *Prema Pradīpa* he used the newly emerging literary form of the Indian novel to illustrate the beauty and relevance of the traditional Vaishnava lifestyle.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to his dozens of books, Bhaktivinoda published the most widely-read and influential Vaishnava journal of the 1880s and 1890s. Bhaktivinoda used his *Sajjanatosani* (printed from 1881–1904) to structure the community of *bhadralok* Vaishnavas that had formed around him. In his periodical Bhaktivinoda wrote reviews of Vaishnava publications, he announced meetings and pilgrimages, he solicited funds for the building of temples and institutional structures, he published poetry and short stories and philosophical treatises. Bhaktivinoda used the platform of a monthly periodical to chastise what he perceived to be improper understandings of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. So too he used the journal to champion writers and ideas with which he agreed. He used the journal to help define a community of religious sentiment in diaspora.<sup>20</sup> Bhaktivinoda himself was a Deputy Magistrate for many of the years that he published his journal and wrote his books. He moved from town to town throughout the Bengal Presidency over the course of twenty-odd years. We know from the subscriber lists of *Sajjanatosani* that his main base of support came from the *bhadralok* class of professionals spread throughout Bengal.<sup>21</sup>

In what follows, I do not wish to elaborate upon Bhaktivinoda Thakura's by now well-known and wildly successful publishing career. It is common knowledge that Bhaktivinoda Thakura inaugurated a religious movement grounded in the publication of the written word. The tradition of printing, publishing, reading and writing that he started has evolved, today, into a global movement where, through the combined efforts of ISKCON and the various Gaudiya Maths, many thousands of Vaishnava books are printed and disseminated each year. One need only glance through the publication lists of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust or the Sri Chaitanya Gaudiya Math to see that the printed word is part and parcel of what it means today to be a Gaudiya Vaishnava in the line of Bhaktivinoda Thakura. In the remaining part of this essay I would like to theorize a few of the ramifications of Bhaktivinoda's publishing activities for the Vaishnava community that he created.

### The Print Revolution: Outline of Consequences

Of course, Bhaktivinoda was not the only person to publish Vaishnava books, nor was he necessarily always the most notable in the nineteenth century. Before Bhaktivinoda, the King of Tripura had patronized the publication of Vaishnava texts. The disreputable presses of Battala had been churning out popular, semi-pornographic Vaishnava poems, legends and short stories in addition to racy versions of puranic tales for nearly 50 years.<sup>22</sup> Brahmos like Keshub Chandra Sen and Bijay Krishna Goswami flirted with "neo-Vaishnavism" and wrote about it throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Even the mighty Bankim Chandra Chatterjee became fascinated with Vaishnavism and included Vaishnava characters in his novels and wrote a "modern" biography of Krishna.

What was special about Bhaktivinoda was his persistence and his focus. He primarily wrote on one theme: Gaudiya Vaishnavism. It dominated his consciousness and became his world. Although still a functionary in the service of the British, he nevertheless published book after book, journal after journal, and tract after tract in an attempt to saturate the market with Vaishnava materials. Although his efforts would never be recognized by the nationalist historiographers the way Sishir Kumar Ghosh's *Amiya Nimai Carit* or Bankim's *Krishna Caritra* were; it is nevertheless the case that for practicing Gaudiya Vaishnavas today, where the names of the others have long since disappeared from the lips of the initiated, the name of Bhaktivinoda remains. The *sampradaya* (community) that he invigorated is the most important Vaishnava community in Bengal today bar none and, in fact, his is the only Vaishnava *sampradaya* to have become a truly global religion.

It should not be assumed either, that Bhaktivinoda's publishing activities and emphases upon books were completely novel innovations of the nineteenth century. If we dare refer to the textualization of Gaudiya Vaishnavism as a "break" with the past, we would do well to remember Frederic Jameson's words about the subtlety of historical breaks rather than inferring any ripping or tearing imagery. Jameson bids us to see breaks and ruptures as differences in degree rather than in kind. He writes: "... radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuring of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary."<sup>23</sup>

Vaishnavas had long placed an emphasis upon reading and they arguably evinced higher literacy rates than the population at large.<sup>24</sup> One need only recall the descriptions in the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* of Chaitanya weeping while reading the *Bhagavata Purana* to demonstrate the paradigmatic felicity of reading in the tradition. So, too, the ample number of manuscripts or *puthis* that bear the imprint of Vaishnava themes in the medieval and pre-modern periods indicates the importance of sacred literature for the Gaudiyas.<sup>25</sup> But what is undeniable is that it wasn't until the nineteenth century that this emphasis upon texts and literacy truly became operative. Certainly there were literate people in Bengal before the nineteenth century and some of them had undoubtedly mastered the material contained within a variety of texts. But what must be remembered is that manuscript production was largely an elite enterprise (i.e., carried out by learned Brahmin Goswamis) and that the method for the reception of texts would have changed dramatically in the nineteenth century.

Previously, the primary means of "experiencing" a text would have been aural. Bengali literacy rates attest to this as do common sense and the work of historians such as Walter Ong and Jack Goody on printing and the transformation of oral societies with the coming of the book.<sup>26</sup> Although Bengal achieved respectable numbers vis-à-vis virtually any other pre-press area of India (or the world for that matter) there is no getting around the fact that, even according to the most liberal estimates apropos of manuscripts, the printing production of the first sixty years of the press in Bengal saw written material in circulation increase by some 80 times that which had been produced in the one-thousand years preceding (100,000 manuscripts—8,000,000 books).<sup>27</sup> But most relevant for our purposes is the institution of *kathakata* (puranic recitation) which has a venerable history borne out by medieval manuscripts; and it still exists today as the primary means of textual mediation in certain sectors of Bengali society, i.e., villages and peasant communities.

The transformation in the nineteenth century was neither complete nor universal. For large portions of the population the mediation and reception of "tradition" came in community, through ritual, via the eyes and ears. But for that small population of all important culture-producers—the middle-class *bhadralok*—the shift from orality to literacy was rapid and decisive. And as this profound social transformation at the level of the *bhadralok* clearly had repercussions for the rest of the population—particularly, in our context, for all orders of Vaishnava practitioners—we would do well

not to underestimate the impact of the Vaishnava print revolution.

The areas of print's impact on Gaudiya Vaishnavism might be conceptualized in six broad categories: Accessibility, Disarticulation, Interpretation, Canon Formation, Community Formation and Laicization. I will briefly outline the main points of each.

### *Accessibility*

Before Bhaktivinoda's efforts, as late as the 1860s, Vaishnava texts were extremely hard to come by in Bengal. Even given the cheap Battatola press editions and the copies distributed gratis by the king of Tripura, serious works dealing with Vaishnavism were few and far between. Traditionally, manuscripts of sacred texts like the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and the *Bhagavata Purana* were housed in private collections of wealthy landlords or less often socially mobile peasants. Some *akhadas* had copies but the texts would be ritually worshiped and were not available to the public outside of the *kathakata* sessions when they would be read aloud. In 1860, while living in Medinipur Bhaktivinoda sought furiously for a copy of the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* but was unable to find one. In his autobiography he wrote in disgust: "*Ami sondhan koriyao aek kopi caritamrita pailam na. Sei granthakhana porile mon sukhi hoibe biswas chilo. Tokhon Boisnob grantha chapa hoe nai.*" ("I tried hard but was not able to lay my hands on a single copy. I truly believed that I would be happy if only I could read this book. But books on Vaishnavism were not yet printed.")<sup>28</sup>

Over the next thirty years this problem would be addressed by Bhaktivinoda and others. By creating inexpensive, compact, portable books dealing with Vaishnava philosophy and practice the press allowed for an accessibility to texts that had previously been unimaginable for enquiring Vaishnavas. Printing the traditional sacred books as well as generating new ones enabled Bhaktivinoda and those like him to, at one and the same time, recover and expand the tradition.

### *Disarticulation*

In the process of expanding the tradition, however, there was an unintended consequence. Namely, the traditional hierarchies of authority from Krishna through Chaitanya to the Goswami to the Mahanto to the Bairagi to the Bhakta were circumvented. Of course, there were other mitigating factors such as the *bhadralok* valorization of history and the scholar's search for religious origins; but one of the most significant consequences of the produc-

tion and dissemination of literature dealing with sacred subjects on a massive scale was the disarticulation of power from the living community of practitioners who were the main components of the "tradition" before the late nineteenth century. Manuscripts that were housed in *akhdas* or family homes and read out presupposed communities of interpretation. What universal access allowed, and what Bhaktivinoda himself participated in, was the reading and interpretation of texts without the formal hermeneutical constraints of a guru or, at the very least, *kathak*. Bhaktivinoda, for example, was able to pick up bits and pieces of Vaishnava philosophy here and there but he came to his interpretations of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* on his own; his interpretations, no doubt, reflected his western education and his particular social position. Although he eventually took initiation from a Goswami in the reputable Bhagnapara *parampara* in 1883, he was nevertheless publishing books and interpreting Vaishnavism for well over a decade before that.<sup>29</sup>

This aspect of the textualization process represented the disarticulation of texts and meanings from the interpretative communities which traditionally defined them, and the relocation of interpretive authority into the hands of either the author or solitary reader. Of course, Bhaktivinoda started his own tradition of interpretation but there were always tensions implicit in his method of prosyletization. For, although he encouraged the reading of texts and the acceptance of a singular, fundamental meaning "as it is" (to quote one of Bhaktivinoda's descendents) he nevertheless attempted to restrict interpretative possibilities by presenting his own interpretations as authoritative through the mediation of a modern textual apparatus—i.e., footnotes, grammatical parsing, indexing, and so on. Texts (i.e., manuscripts) were rhetorically valorized prior to the mid-nineteenth century but were in the hands of Goswamis and traditional leaders of largely illiterate masses. Manuscripts presupposed religious professionals and interpretative communities. Texts and gurus reinforced each other's power and authority. But direct experience of a text was primarily oral, the interior reading experience being limited to a specialist elite—generally trained in Sanskrit.

Through the labors of Bhaktivinoda Thakura access to Vaishnava texts was democratized and the guru more or less disappeared as the idea of "tradition" began to rest primarily in the text which could be read and experienced on one's own. While Bhaktivinoda was certainly not doing away with the traditional system of guru-disciple relationships—far from it!—his emphasis on the textual foundations of sacred truth enabled new possibili-

ties for the mediation of religious teachings within the context of a diasporic Vaishnava community. In a text read alone by a solitary reader any intermediary between author/editor and reader disappears. The tradition is presented directly to the individual who necessarily imagines that he or she is gaining access to primal truth. Nevertheless, the problem of interpretation remains.

### *Interpretation*

For Bhaktivinoda the text always pointed beyond itself to something Absolute and True.<sup>30</sup> His method of reading contradicted those he called the "shallow critics" and his interpretive work can fruitfully be regarded as a form of contestation and resistance where he accepts the importance of reading and of textual criticism but he nevertheless contests the interpretations of Vaishnava scripture proffered by the British and Young Bengal. Bhaktivinoda encouraged his readers to break free of what Partha Chatterjee has deemed the "colonial prisonhouse of reason" by opening themselves up to the wisdom of indigenous texts.<sup>31</sup> His method of interpretation and reclamation of a discredited/subversive text represented an indigenous/colonized spin on modern critical methods of interpretation whereby reason is subordinated to faith (*shraddha*) and faith is coterminous with the indigenous (i.e., that which has been left behind through colonization).

Obviously thinking of the modernizer's obsession with the new and trendy, Bhaktivinoda urged readers of the *Bhagavata Purana*, for example, not to disregard an old, native sacred text simply because it was indigenous and not modern. Bhaktivinoda wrote: "Progress certainly is the law of nature and there must be corrections and developments with the progress of time. But progress means going further or rising higher. Now, if we are to follow our foolish critic [i.e., Young Bengal or the British Missionaries] we are to go back to our former terminus and make a new race, and when we have run half the race, another critic of his stamp will cry out: 'Begin anew, because the wrong road has been taken!' In this way our stupid critics will never allow us to go over the whole road and see what is in the other terminus."<sup>32</sup> Rather than adhering to the cry of the radicals and secular reformers who shouted out: "Begin anew . . . the old masonry does not answer at present," Bhaktivinoda encouraged the readers of ancient Vaishnava texts to allow the "author's thought [to] progress in the reader in the shape of correction and development." Bhaktivinoda wrote that "the best critic [is the one who] can show the further development of an old thought."<sup>33</sup>

He called for “literal” interpretations of tried and true texts. And in this way, Bhaktivinoda represented a peculiar colonial twist on a familiar fundamentalist response to modernity. The independent trajectory of modernization that Bhaktivinoda developed was one where he valorized texts that had been deemed vulgar, uncivilized, primitive, and disreputable by the mandarins of the British and reform-minded Bengali modernizing establishment. At the same time Bhaktivinoda’s trajectory utilized the very same tools of reason and textual analysis that had been marshaled against the texts in the first place. It was not Christianity nor even Brahmoism that was the religion most appropriate to the modern moment for Bhaktivinoda. Rather it was Vaishnavism—the Bengali religion most reviled by the colonial missionaries and the *babu* establishment. Bhaktivinoda negotiated a discrete discursive space where troubling passages of sacred texts could be ironed out. Through his use of reason and textual analysis he was complicit with the dominant power structures but his mind was one “split in two.”<sup>34</sup> He had to break free and rely upon faith in order to reclaim and valorize his version of the tradition. He was both “complicit with” and “contesting of” colonial structures. Like Partha Chatterjee’s Bengali novelists who lapse repeatedly into dialogue when Victorian aesthetic standards demanded pure description, Bhaktivinoda attempted to break free of the oppressive structures of colonial literary criticism and canons of interpretation where Vaishnava gods were considered to be licentious and mythology unbelievable.<sup>35</sup>

### *Canon Formation*

Bhaktivinoda, through his publishing activities, generated a de facto canon of his own. What was read was very important to Bhaktivinoda. After nearly a decade at Sishir Kumar Ghosh’s *Vishnupriya Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, Bhaktivinoda resigned his editorship in 1890 claiming that he could no longer work for a newspaper that published *avaishnava* material. This was in keeping with Bhaktivinoda’s general desire to create a canon of religious material that could be read by his countrymen, providing them both with a sense of national pride and a spiritual, “transcendental” outlook on life.

A canon defines a discursive space, it creates an orthodoxy and in many important ways sets the limits of what can be thought.<sup>36</sup> By deciding what would be published and what not, Bhaktivinoda was able to tailor his modern brand of Vaishnavism to his consuming audience. It must be remembered that Bhaktivinoda sold most of his books. In part what he published



was determined by the marketplace. The printing process had everything to do with markets. With the printing press we no longer see isolated *bhaktas/ mahantos/ bairagis* copying out *puthis* or developing manuscripts under court or *jaminsdari* patronage. Rather we see printed texts being produced in mass quantities. With printed texts capital must be fronted (printing is by its very nature a capitalist enterprise; funding has to be much greater than with *puthis* and all of the capital has to be given up front, thus necessitating the sale of books) and that capital must be recovered somehow. Even if patronage fronts capital, the numbers are large enough that rarely is no money expected back. The texts are sold, which is a change from manuscripts which are bartered or gifted. The fact that texts must be sold and that capital must be recovered means that the production of new printed texts becomes tied to market forces. The market becomes significant. Texts must reflect the needs of niche markets in order to be viable and self-sustaining (or at least remotely so). In this way production and consumption become intimately connected. Here we see an example of the "capitalization" or commercialization of Vaishnavism.

Bhaktivinoda's marketplace was full of prudish, moralistic *bhadralok* consumers who were interested in the much maligned version of Vaishnavism that the Gaudiyas represented, but necessarily wary of it. It is not surprising to note therefore that the *Gita Govinda* was quietly removed from Bhaktivinoda's Gaudiya Vaishnava canon. Though one of the most well known Vaishnava poems, it was never published by Bhaktivinoda nor was it mentioned in his review journal in any context other than negative. So, too, Bhaktivinoda's foregrounding of the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* over the *Chaitanya Bhagavata* represented a movement away from popular devotion and toward rigorous theology and philosophical concerns.

Bhaktivinoda used his journal *Sajjanatosani* to review the Vaishnava literature that was being published during the 1880s and 1890s. He routinely put his stamp of approval on certain texts and rigorously denounced others in multi-page attacks. In his journal (the most widely circulated Vaishnava periodical in the latter half of the nineteenth century) he advertised books, serialized his own writings and encouraged his readers to submit articles in line with the type of Vaishnavism that he was promoting. As a regulatory device the journal provided a means by which Bhaktivinoda could continually define and redefine his canon with the help of a growing community of followers and like-minded comrades.



*Community Formation and Laicization*

Another outgrowth of the print revolution in Gaudiya Vaishnavism was the creation of an "imagined" community.<sup>37</sup> Traditionally, Vaishnava communities in Bengal had been centered around *akhdas* and *mandirs* or at the very least periodic *kirtana* sessions. With spotty literacy rates, no universal access to texts or advanced education, and the settled agrarian lifestyle indicative of the *jamindari* land tenure system, prior to the nineteenth century Vaishnavism was defined primarily by the presence of a physical living community. However, Bhaktivinoda enabled the creation of an imaginary community connected by texts and uniform theological or ideological inclinations. Bhaktivinoda encouraged the readers of *Sajjanatosani* to submit articles and help to define the status of the emerging *sampradaya*. Readers wrote letters of appreciation, sent in articles helping to clarify appropriate Vaishnava behavior, etc.

One need not retrace the steps of Benedict Anderson in showing how the press can be used to generate "imagined communities." It is more important to remember that this community of Vaishnavas that Bhaktivinoda helped to create was located in a specific colonial socio-cultural milieu. A community of the mind would have obviously been superfluous had there not been felt a pressing need by the *bhadralok* bureaucrats and apparatchiks who were being shuffled around the Bengal presidency in a manner which never could have been dreamed of before 1857. The social dislocation of middle-class workers like Bhaktivinoda (who at one point lived in six different towns in as many years) rendered the old social ties and forms of religious community obsolete. The literature of the 1870s and 1880s is replete with descriptions of the unbearableness of *chakri* and middle-class work culture.<sup>38</sup> Bhaktivinoda's publishing activities responded to a felt need of a unique constituency that was created by the colonial situation.

Also, printed texts were implicated in the "laicization" of Vaishnavism. Texts meant for a middle-class readership in diaspora enabled the imagined community to develop based upon standardized/uniform texts and over-determined interpretations. Like-thinking individuals could be created and they could participate in an imagined community. Separation from a guru (i.e., the writer of the texts: in this case Bhaktivinoda) encouraged a strict reliance upon the texts and an imaginative world of religion and philosophy. In this way, praxis was subordinated to ideology due to the diasporic nature of the religious experience or engagement.

With texts as the primary method of the transmission (production and

reproduction) of tradition, a community of followers distinct from any concrete institutions could develop. So too the members did not have to be religious specialists in constant contact with the source of information and charisma. They could read about the tradition and participate in it internally through the common experience of interiority. The solitary reading of sacred texts became the primary religious act for them. All that was required was the time, effort and know-how to read books.

The new class of working literati in the Vaishnava community could be good Vaishnavas, in touch with an imagined community, through participating in the "imaginary" world of the books. They could read about being mendicants and *sannyasins* (see Bhaktivinoda's *Jaiva Dharma* and *Prema Pradipa*); they did not have to actually live those realities themselves except on the mental level. They could hold out the promise for themselves that they would one day live the ideal at the end of the Varnashrama cycle. But for the time being they could participate in that world imaginatively through texts. The religious authority for the texts still came from the guru. This much had not changed. But in the case of Bhaktivinoda the guru lived far away and the authority of the guru was mediated through the texts, which held his words. This was the first time in Indian history that one can see the mediation of charisma (guru authority) through written texts produced contemporaneously with the life of the guru. Or, more specifically, this was the first time that this type of mediation became the primary mode of interacting with a guru and his teaching. The printing press and texts enabled:

1. The formation of a community in diaspora;
2. The transmission of tradition and interaction with charisma through the mediated vehicle of the written word;
3. The laicization of the tradition by severing it from ties to *akhadas*, traditional institutions, traditional gurus, etc.

Apobos of the last point, Bhaktivinoda was able to enter the traditional/ orthodox Vaishnava fray by embracing print capitalism and using the printing press for his specific religious purposes. He could publish more books in a year than the entire number of hand-written manuscripts up to that time. And because he was attuned to market forces he was successful in recruiting devotees.

One could argue that this capitalist intervention brought about the commercialization of Vaishnavism in the nineteenth century as traditional Goswamis and religious leaders were forced to confront the new market realities and the intervention of brilliant young publishers like Bhaktivinoda. By doing an "end run" around modern critiques of Gaudiya Vaish-

navism, Bhaktivinoda was able to go back to the “original” tradition—articulated through ancient texts. In this way he was able to circumvent the need to meaningfully engage either the critics of Vaishnavism or the living community of Vaishnavas that he sought to reform.

For example, one might be encouraged to participate in *kirtana* or go to a temple or make a pilgrimage to Vrindaban. But, in practice, the experience of the religion for Bhaktivinoda’s disciples would have come through the reading of books and articles. In this way, the act of reading became sacred. Ties to traditional establishments and structures of authority were de-emphasized. The texts allowed for a kind of mobile community and institution that could be taken with one wherever he or she went. The guru, through the mediation of the written word, came along with the *bhakta* to whatever new job and in whatever new location he might find himself. This was especially important to the *bhadralok* bureaucrats who rarely stayed in any one place for more than a year or so. They needed a new form of religious mediation that fit their new lifestyle and Bhaktivinoda’s program of textualization enabled it. He could not find texts in Orissa; he had them sent to Dinajpur. The tradition had to become mobile and texts allowed this. Of course, there had always been wandering *bairagis*, but they lived in a sacred geographical circuit and went from teacher to teacher. Bhaktivinoda encouraged this outlook and inclination as well but in a modified way. Regardless, devotion for most of the people would have always been centered in a particular village or locality for an entire life. The change, which is tied to the process of textualization, had to do with the increased geographical mobility of Bengali middle-class men in the nineteenth century.

### Conclusion

I began this essay by recounting the story of Babai and his frustration with his new *bhadralok* uncle. Recall, if you will, Babai’s words: “He just lies there and reads books!” What Babai couldn’t know at that point in his young life was the full import of what he was saying. I have briefly sketched the discernible transformations that resulted from the print revolution in Gaudiya Vaishnavism with the specific intention of starting a conversation and taking a preliminary step toward theorizing the impact of the application of this new technology on a unique religious tradition at a key historical juncture. So, too, I have tried to dilate upon an understudied area of *bhadralok* ambivalence. Scenes like the one of Babai’s uncle lying around

reading should not be considered to be wholesale adoptions of "western" or "modern" structures and modes of being. Rather, as I have tried to indicate, the scenario that played itself out in colonial Bengal was much more complex than that and represented something greater than simply a recapitulation, in a different part of the world, of structures and trends set forth 400 years earlier during the print revolution in Europe. The *bhadralok* adaptation to new technologies and structures of meaning and authority was unique and demonstrative of the discrete socio-cultural circumstances that existed in Bengal in the late nineteenth century.

The Bengali model of modernization in this respect was no derivative discourse but was rather indicative of the peculiar tensions and contradictions inherent in *bhadralok* life in the post-mutiny era. Through the use of the press, the indigenous tradition of Gaudiya Vaishnavism was recovered and appropriated in novel ways. In the process it was transformed. Bhaktivinoda's innovations in the realm of print media defined the parameters of a Vaishnava modernity, and these are the parameters by which most Gaudiya Vaishnava communities operate even today.

#### ENDNOTES

1. The following story has been adapted from Gautam Bhadra's "*Kathakatar nana katha*," in *Samskriti visayak yogasutra*. Oct.-Dec. 1993, Special edition on *Unis satak o vis sataker bangla kathakata*, Eds. Binoy Ghosh and Gautam Bhadra, pp. 169-278.

2. Ibid. p. 169.

3. Vide William Ward, *View of the History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindoos including a minute description of their manners and customs and translations from their principal works*, Second Edition, Vol. II, Serampore, 1815, pp. 220.

4. Bhadra, *Kathakata*, p. 178.

5. "*Samajcitra (purva o vartaman) athava kendeler jivan*," in *Manomohan basur aprak-asita diary*, edited by Sunil Das, Calcutta, 1981, p. 101.

6. Bhadra, *Kathakata*, p. 175.

7. For the history of printing and print capitalism in India, see P. A. Mohanrajan, *Glimpses of Early Printing and Publishing in India*, Madras: Mohanavalli Publications, 1990; A. K. Priolkar, *The Printing Press in India: Its Beginning and Early Development*, Bombay: Marathi Samshodhan Mandal, 1958; B. S. Kesavan, *History of Printing and Publishing in India: A Story of Cultural Re-awakening*, Volume I, Delhi: National Book Trust, 1984.

8. The term *bhadralok* refers to the urban middle-class that developed in India under colonial rule. Vide B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961; John McGuire, *The Making of a*

*Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadrakalok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1983.

9. *The Bengal Magazine*. Vol. 2, 419.

10. Cf. Erik Olin Wright, *Classes*, London: Verso, 1997.

11. Summit Sarkar, "Kaliyuga, Chakri, and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times," in *Writing Social History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 282-283.

12. Cf. "On the effect of the Native Press in India," *Friend of India—Quarterly* Vol. I. 1821. pp. 119-140.

13. *Ibid.* p. 119.

14. For a discussion of the relationship between emerging "disciplines" and nationalist revival in nineteenth century Bengal, see Partha Chatterjee, Ed., *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*. Calcutta: Samya, 1996; especially, for our purposes, Tapati Roy's "Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature," *ibid.* pp. 30-62.

15. Cited in Murdoch, J. Krishna, *The Hindu Ideal of the Twentieth Century: An Account of His Life as Given in the Mahabharata, Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas and the Harivamsa*. Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India. 1902, p. 41.

16. For two good summary accounts (respectively) of reformation and revivalist movements within Hinduism under British rule see Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; and Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

17. Cf. Shukavak N. Dasa, *Hindu Encounter With Modernity: Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda, Vaisnava Theologian*, Los Angeles: Sanskrit Religions Institute, 1999; Thomas J. Hopkins, "A Vital Transition: the Molding of the Hare Krishna Movement in British India," *Back to Godhead Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 8 (August, 1981); Rupa Vilasa Dasa, *The Seventh Goswami: A Biography of His Divine Grace Srila Saccidananda Bhaktivinoda Thakura*, Mumbai: Sri Sri Sitaram Seva Trust, 1989; Banarasinath Bharadwaj, *Kedarnatha Datta: Anabiskrita Sahitya Pratibha*, Calcutta: Sri Chaitanya Research Institute, 1989, (Bengali); Sundarananda Vidyavinoda, *Thakura Bhaktivinoda*, Calcutta: Madhva Gaudiya Math, 1937, (Bengali); Satkari Chattopadhyaya, *A Glimpse into the Life of Thakur Bhaktivinoda: with an introduction by Babu Sarada Charan Mitra*, M.A. L.L. Ex-Judge of the Calcutta High Court, Calcutta: Thakur Bhakti Vinode Memorial Committee, 1916; and Bhaktivinoda Thakura, *Swalikhita Jivani*, Calcutta: Lalita Prasada Datta, 1916.

18. Vide Kedarnath Datta (Bhaktivinoda Thakura), *Krishna Samhita*, 3rd Edition, Mayapur: Sri Chaitanya Math, 1960, (Bengali and Sanskrit) and *Sri Sri Chaitanya Shikshamrita*, Mayapur: Sri Chaitanya Math, 1974 (Bengali).

19. Vide Kedarnath Datta (Bhaktivinoda Thakura), *Jaiva Dharma*, Madras: Sri Gaudiya Math, 1975 and *Prema Pradipa*, Calcutta: Chaitanya Press, 1886, (Bengali).

20. Vide Jason D. Fuller, "Re-memembering the Tradition: Bhaktivinoda Thakura's *Sajjanatosani* and the Construction of a Middle-Class Vaisnava Sampradaya in

Nineteenth-Century Bengal," in Antony Copley, ed., *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform Hindutva, Gender, Sampradaya*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 173-210.

21. Cf. (For Example) Kedarnath Datta, ed., *Sajjantosaṇi*, Volume 6, No. 1, Calcutta: Vaishnava Depository Press, 1894, pp. 20-21.

22. Cf. Sripantha (Nikhil Sarkar), *Battala*, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1997.

23. Frederic Jameson. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in his *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998*, London: Verso, 1998. P. 18.

24. Cf. Juthika Basu. *Bhoumik. Banla Puthir Puspika*, Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1999, pp. 50-55; Donna Marie Wulff, "Images and Roles of Women in Bengali Vaisnava Padavali Kirtan," in Joseph T. O'Connell, ed., *Bengal Vaisnavism, Orientalism, Society and the Arts*, East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1985, p. 14;

25. See Jotindra Mohan Bhattacharjee. *Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts*, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1978; Edward C. Dimock (trans.) and Tony K. Stewart (ed.) *Caitanya Caritamṛta of Krishnadasa Kaviraja*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 48-57; Ramakanta Chakrabarty, *Vaisnavism in Bengal*, pp. 1-70 passim.

26. See Kathleen Gough, "The Implications of Literacy in Traditional China and India," in Jack Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 70-71; Cf. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London and New York: Mtehuen, 1982.

27. Cf. James Long. "Returns relating to the Publications in the Bengali Language in 1857," in *Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government*, no. XXXII, Calcutta: General Printing Department, 1859.

28. Bhaktivinoda Thakura, *Svalikhita Jivani*, Calcutta: 1916, pp. 102-103.

29. By the time that Bhaktivinoda received initiation he had already published over twenty books dealing with Vaishnavism. Cf. Shukavak Das, *Encounter*, pp. 283-287.

30. See, for example, Bhaktivinoda's defense of sacred Vaishnava texts in his famous Dinajpur speech, recounted in Kedarnath Datta, *The Bhagavata: Its Philosophy, Ethics, and Theology*, 2nd Edition, Madras: Madras Gaudiya Math, 1959.

31. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 55.

32. Thakura, *Bhagavata*, pp. 4,5.

33. Ibid., p. 5.

34. Chatterjee, *Nation*, p. 54.

35. Ibid., pp. 54-56.

36. Cf. John Guillory, "Canon," in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2nd Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 233 - 249.

37. Vide Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

## PART II

### THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS (ISKCON)

#### INTRODUCTION

It is extremely difficult for me to write an objective, scholarly introduction to this section on the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON, founded 1966) and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1896–1977), the movement's founder. In the first place, there would be no *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* without Prabhupāda and the movement he founded, because there would be no "Satyarāja Dāsa" (my religious name)—it was my involvement with this movement and my relationship with Prabhupāda, as his initiated disciple, that sparked my lifelong interest in Vaishnavism and my resultant desire to publish an academic journal dedicated to this rich tradition. In other words, I am emotionally involved with this movement and therefore question my ability to document its achievement and value in a removed, scholarly way.

That having been said, I realize that my task is not as daunting as it might at first seem. The scholars and scholarly devotees who have contributed to this volume have provided a balanced view of Prabhupāda and his movement, and little more needs to be said. What few words I do feel the need to say, I have saved for my essay, written in cooperation with **Bruce N. Scharf** (one of Prabhupāda's earliest disciples), in the pages that follow. A brief history of Prabhupāda and his accomplishments can be found in most of the essays you are about to read, and some background on the movement comes through as well. My remaining duty, then, seems clear: I need merely introduce the articles and direct the reader to other substantial academic studies that focus on Prabhupāda and his movement.

I would like to begin, however, by pointing out that Prabhupāda's movement was not the beginning of Vaishnavism in the West. For example, we

read of the Greek ambassador Heliodorus, who, in the second century BCE, erected a famous monument at Besnagar in honor of Vāsudeva Lord Śrī Krishna. As Tom Hopkins has suggested, “If Heliodorus was a Vaishnava, there must have been others, too.”

We are also aware of the work of other Vaishnava *sādhus* who came West prior to Prabhupāda, such as Premānanda Bhārati (see **Gerald Carney’s** contribution to this volume); Mahanam Brata Brahmachari (whose work on Jīva Gosvāmin at the University of Chicago is well-known); Yogi Shri Krishna Prem (or Ronald Nixon, the Britisher who came to India in the 1930s, converted to Vaishnavism and returned to the West, writing books and initiating disciples); and also Prabhupāda’s Godbrothers, such as Bon Mahārāja, Bhaktisaraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja, and B. P. Tīrtha Mahārāja, who came West decades before Prabhupāda, and whose collective work in the West produced such notable disciples as Daisy Cecilia Bowtell (or Vinodavānī Dāsī), who was given charge of the Vāsudeva Gauḍīya Maṭha in London, Stella Harris (or Viṣṇupriyā Dāsī), and a Mr. Schulze, who was eventually initiated as Sadānanda Dāsa. This latter personality was responsible for the conversion of Walther Eidlitz (Vāmana Dāsa), who proceeded to write several important works on Gauḍīya Vaishnavism, including *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya: Sein Leben und Seine Lehre* and *Unknown India: A Pilgrimage into a Forgotten World*.

But it should nevertheless be clear that of all Vaishnava movements come West, ISKCON has shown prominence and staying power. Moreover, of all *sādhus* come West, Prabhupāda was the most suited to the task, both in terms of his vast learning and his spiritual accomplishment. Certainly his movement is the most visible (and audible), with its devotees chanting in the streets of every major town and village of the world, distributing books in airports and shopping centers, and its Hare Krishna *mahā-mantra* having made its way, in one form or another, at one time or another, into everyone’s ear. The movement is synonymous with Prabhupāda, with his more than 100 books—translations and commentaries on Vaishnava scriptures—selling in the hundreds of millions, in every major language of the world, and his schools, temples, vegetarian *prasādam* restaurants, and devotees taking their place in the world’s popular imagination. Thus, more often than not, the essays in this part of the book will focus on Prabhupāda, for the movement has little meaning without reference to this glorious personality.

Academic works on Prabhupāda and his movement abound. Some of the more important ones are as follows: the earliest academic studies of the



movement are J. Stillson Judah, *Hare Krishna and the Counterculture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974) and Francine Jeanne Daner, *The American Children of Kṛṣṇa: A Study of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976); these were followed by ed., Steven J. Gelberg, *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna: Five Distinguished Scholars on the Krishna Movement in the West* (New York: Grove press, 1983); Angela Burr, *I Am Not My Body: A Study of the International Hare Krishna Sect* (Delhi: Vikas, 1984); E. Burke Rocheford, Jr., *Hare Krishna in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985); Kim Knott, *My Sweet Lord: The Hare Krishna Movement* (Northamptonshire, Great Britain: The Aquarian Press, 1986); Larry D. Shinn, *The Dark Lord: Cult Images and the Hare Krishnas in America* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987); Charles R. Brooks, *The Hare Krishnas in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); eds., David G. Bromley and Larry D. Shinn, *Krishna Consciousness in the West* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), and there are others as well.

The first paper presented here is by **Tamal Krishna Goswami** and **Ravi Gupta**. In many ways this paper is essential in that it contextualizes Prabhupāda and his followers, giving some of the necessary background information on the tradition from which Prabhupāda emerged. It asks questions about just what was involved in transplanting Vaishnava culture on western shores, and answers them, too. **Charles Brooks** follows up on this theme, showing how ISKCON connects to the parent tradition as it is practiced in India. After this, **Kim Knott** takes a close look at both insider and outsider perspectives on Prabhupāda and ISKCON. How do his followers perceive him, or relate to him? do removed scholars view him as a holy person, and what do they think of his work? Then comes the article I co-wrote with **Bruce Scharf**, which explores the exact moment in history that Prabhupāda deigned to come West—averring that it couldn't have been more appropriate. Tamal Krishna Goswami then offers us his second article for this volume, this time on Prabhupāda as translator and commentator supreme. He explains Prabhupāda's strategy in presenting his books in the way that he did. Next, **Graham M. Schweig** looks at two apparently contradictory themes in Prabhupāda's teachings—the recurring idea that Gauḍiṃya Vaishnavism is confidential and particular and at the same time universal and nonsectarian; the subtleties involved in this analysis point to the very essence of Prabhupāda's message—"Krishna Consciousness" is "the most intimate expression of love of God" and at the same time a "universal

religion" that is meant for anyone who is open to it.

**Klaus K. Klostermaier** ponders the theology of Krishna Consciousness, exploring early objections to Krishna worship in India and his own association with one of Prabhupāda's Godbrothers, just prior to Prabhupāda's journey West. He also makes special note of Prabhupāda's extraordinary qualities as a "spiritual educator." Renowned musicologist **Guy L. Beck** then analyzes Prabhupāda as a *rasika* musician with a unique vocal talent for Vaishnava songs—instrumental Indian music had made its way West, but until Prabhupāda Vaishnava lyrical music had been confined to India. *Kīrtana* is now all the rage in Western countries, but who knew that this largely began with Prabhupāda? Next, **Rahul Peter Das** focuses on a subject that has been a curiosity for many an Indologist and more than a few authorities on Vedic literature—Prabhupāda's peculiar use of the terms "Veda" and "Vedic." Das explains the various legitimate usages of these terms, and how Prabhupāda and his followers either conform to or disregard these usages.

**Gerald Carney** then offers a unique approach to understanding Prabhupāda and his movement. By comparing and contrasting ISKCON's guru with another Vaishnava come West, Premānanda Bhāratī, Carney unveils the true depth of Prabhupāda's work. **Kenneth Rose** also brings comparison and contrast into the discussion by looking at Christianity in relation to ISKCON and asking what, if anything, could religionists in the West learn from this rather exotic and esoteric religious tradition. **Shukavak Das** then offers a penultimate article about the practice, or *sādhana*, of Bhaktivinode Thākura, one of ISKCON's respected predecessors in the Gauḍīya Vaishnava tradition. He shows that Bhaktivinode engaged in an esoteric practice that is open to Prabhupāda's followers, but that they tend to prefer an alternative form of this tradition provided by Prabhupāda and his guru, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura (the distinguished son of Bhaktivinoda). This latter article provides food for thought, and may even suggest future directions that ISKCON might eventually embrace. Along similar lines, almost as an appendix, the volume closes with an interview with sociologist **Burke Rochford, Jr.**, about ISKCON's future, though focusing on more practical concerns. The conversation took place in 1992, and, as such, it was strangely prophetic, for ISKCON did indeed move in the directions the article suggests.

—Steven J. Rosen

## KRISHNA AND CULTURE

### What Happens When the Lord of Vrindavan Moves to New York City?

Tamal Krishna Goswami  
and Ravi M. Gupta

*This essay originated in a presentation delivered by Tamal Krishna Goswami at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, as part of a panel on Mahā-gurus and their movements. The panelists agreed to collect their papers for publication in an edited volume (forthcoming). Due to Goswami's untimely passing, the editors—Cynthia Humes (Claremont McKenna College) and Thomas Forsthoefel (Mercyhurst College)—requested me to build his presentation into a full-length article for inclusion in the book. The article is printed here with their kind permission. —Ravi M. Gupta*

Imagine, if you will, a seventy-year-old Vaishnava scholar journeying from India aboard a steamship bound for America. His personal effects consist of but a few sets of saffron renunciate's cloth, a pair of white rubber shoes, and forty rupees ("hardly a day's spending money," he would later remark after arriving in New York City). Though asking for alms is a privilege of his calling, he has no intention of begging. Before taking the vow of renunciation (*sannyāsa*), he had family, a business, and hailed from a community of Bengali merchants who prospered during the British Raj. Now he had stowed amidst the ship's cargo three treasure chests filled with sets of his published translations of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. These priceless treasures are to be both the basis of his mission and the means of his survival, but he wonders how the West will receive them. Arriving at Boston Harbor on September 17, 1965, observing the awesome display of material success played out on the American skyline, he composes the following lines:

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, You are so kind upon this useless soul, but I do not know why You have brought me here. Now You can do whatever You like with me. But I guess You have some business here, otherwise why would You bring me to this terrible place? Most of the population here is covered by the material modes of ignorance and passion. Absorbed in material life, they think themselves very happy and satisfied, and therefore they have no taste for the transcendental message of Vāsudeva [Krishna]. I do not know how they will be able to understand it.<sup>1</sup> (Goswami, S.: vol.II:281).

From the moment of his landing, his thoughts pregnant with uncertainty, to his first temples in the counter-culture capitals of New York's Lower East Side and San Francisco's Haight, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami focused his mission: to transplant the sacred wisdom of India into the fertile soil of the West. His mission was time-bound, no less by his advanced age than by the growing secularism that had already begun to uproot his motherland's timeworn traditions. If his fledgling attempt succeeded in America, he would not only export it all over the world, but use it to rekindle the flagging spirit of his own countrymen.

In the decade that followed, Prabhupāda—to use the respectful address later given Bhaktivedanta Swami by his disciples—toured the globe continuously, delivering public lectures, initiating disciples and managing the missionary activities of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Krishna devotees were soon to be seen in most major cities of the Western world, clothed in saffron robes similar to those Prabhupāda had worn to America, selling copies of his *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Bhagavad-gītā* translations, and otherwise practicing an altogether foreign way of life. Indeed, Prabhupāda's success in transplanting an Eastern tradition intact with all its colorful detail into a materially prosperous and upbeat America is often considered a distinguishing feature of his movement.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the very notion of transplantation entails more than just the transport of an object from one locale to another. As any gardener can attest, success in transplanting depends as much on the conditions of the new environment as it does on having a healthy and vigorous specimen. The arrival of a plant in a new landscape means that the landscape will be changed, but it also requires the plant to change in response to its new environment. The plant's survival depends upon its ability to interact with, and adapt itself to, the differences in soil, water, light, and heat.

So also is the case with a cross-cultural transplant. For any institution whose interests are otherworldly, cultural negotiations can be problematic.

In this essay, we will explore how A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and his followers wrestle with culture as they attempt to “market” their message of Krishna globally. Our interest is in their attitude towards cultural engagement in principle—that is, in the theological resources available to Krishna devotees for cross-cultural engagement. We are also interested in how those resources are utilized in real-life situations requiring cross-cultural encounter. The interface between Krishna and culture can be studied from a variety of disciplinary perspectives; one could, for example, locate the impetus for cultural adaptation in social, political, or economic circumstances. Our method will give primacy to the role of theology in shaping and delimiting the realm of cultural engagement. Theological studies of the Hare Krishna movement are far too few, especially considering the theologically-focused nature of Prabhupāda’s mission to the West.<sup>3</sup>

But first we must ask two simple yet fundamental questions: what is culture? and who is Krishna? At a basic level, the term “culture” refers to the ideas, values, and rules that guide behavior within society. Most culture-theorists agree that mental entities such as beliefs and perceptions are essential to any definition of culture. Clifford Geertz, for example, describes culture as “the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action” (144-5). What is not so easily decided is whether human behavior and its products should also be included as constituents of culture. Anthropologist Marvin Harris argues strongly for a more inclusive definition of culture, one that “embraces all aspects of social life, including both thought and behavior” (19).

For our purposes, a purely ideational understanding of culture would impose too narrow a frame on the colorful collage arising from the interplay of Krishna and culture. In training his young recruits, Prabhupāda was as concerned with inculcating them in the proper lifestyle and behavior of a Vaishnava (a devotee of Vishnu or Krishna), as he was with teaching theological truths. Indeed, his disciples’ attention to the minutiae of purity laws, dietary rules, and dress codes was crucial to their subsequent acceptance by Hindu communities in India.<sup>4</sup> Doxology, praxis, and the institutions supporting them went hand in hand in Prabhupāda’s missionary strategy.

The theology of Chaitanya Vaishnavism—the school of devotional Vedānta to which Prabhupāda belongs—also favors a broad understanding of culture. This understanding is embedded in the theology at a deep level, for it is inferable from the very nature of the Supreme Deity. Chaitanya Vaishnavism, also known as Gauḍīya Vaishnavism due to its Bengali origins,

was founded in the fifteenth-century by the saint and spiritual teacher Śrī Chaitanya, who is considered by the tradition to be an incarnation of God. Chaitanya taught that the singing of Krishna's names is the easiest means of attaining spiritual perfection in this age, and that unmotivated love for Krishna (*prema*) is the highest human goal, beyond even liberation (*mokṣa*).

Chaitanya Vaishnavas identify the Supreme Deity as Krishna, the blue-hued cowherd boy who is famous as the speaker of *Bhagavad-gītā*. Krishna possesses infinite energies or potencies, by which he creates, controls and enjoys all that exists. The energies of God are grouped into three principle categories in a manner unique to this school.<sup>5</sup> The spiritual energy (*cit-* or *svarūpa-śakti*) is Krishna's own internal potency responsible for his abode, associates, and his own form; the material energy (*māyā-śakti*) is his external energy active in the material world; and the living entity (*jīva-śakti*) is his marginal energy located on the borderline between the other two. These energies are the source of all the variety and splendor found in both the phenomenal and spiritual worlds. They are inseparably associated with the Lord. That is, there is no time or place where Krishna exists without his abode, devotees, or attendant paraphernalia.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the energies of God are dynamic and eventful; they make the spiritual world a realm of activity, relationships, and excitement.

Thus, to be consistent with Gauḍīya theology, the realm of cultural engagement must be extended in fact beyond temporal existence. Unlike the nondual understanding of Advaita Vedānta, when Gauḍīyas speak of liberation they refer to a state of existence that is as culturally specific as any found here in this world. Krishna's land Vrindavana, the cows, the cowherd folk, their dress, foods, language, activities, and so on, all of which are described in texts like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and which even today we see vestiges of in India (especially in Bengal and Braj), are considered replicas of a transcendent realm existing beyond the mundane world in a space made sacred by a Krishna-centered culture.

It is not too difficult, then, to see the challenges that might arise when the message of Krishna is extended globally. For a tradition wherein cultural particulars cannot be brushed aside as superficial externalities, the interface between Krishna and other cultures is likely to be an enduring problem. Borrowing from H. Richard Niebuhr's much more thorough investigation of a not entirely dissimilar problematic—that of Christ and culture—we may discover three possible responses to this challenge, however general they may be: Krishna *against* culture, Krishna *of* culture, and a third

that both distinguishes and affirms the two.<sup>7</sup>

In charting the course of Krishna's move West, we find that Prabhupāda and his followers oscillate between these alternatives—sometimes emphasizing opposition to culture, sometimes agreement with it, sometimes both. Apart from the immediate demands of management and missionary strategy, their flexibility has a theological basis. In fact, it has its basis in the same theory of energies that gave rise to the cultural specificity of Chaitanya Vaishnavism. The external energy, *māyā*, covers the natural luminosity of the living entities, making them forget their relationship with Krishna. This leads to perennial bondage in the cycle of birth and death. Thus, the living entities are admonished not to become entangled in *māyā*'s illusions—humanly created cultural constructs—giving rise to the rubric, *Krishna against culture*. But when the very same cultural constructions conduce to Krishna consciousness—that is, through the agency of devotion (*bhakti*), when they become useful for Krishna's service—the tension is removed, producing *Krishna of culture*.

This allowance, or rather, prescription, to use the phenomenal world in Krishna's service bestows value on human creativity and endeavor, and tempers the world-negating aspects of Vedānta philosophy. This *modus operandi* is known as *yukta-vairāgya*, renunciation through proper utilization, or giving up the world by returning it to its proper status as related with God.<sup>8</sup> *Yukta-vairāgya* was championed by Prabhupāda's guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, who regularly employed modern conveniences to facilitate his mission. He traveled in cars and trains, wore sewn clothing, and sent disciples overseas—activities that were considered taboo for one in the renounced order. In 1935, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī asked Prabhupāda (then Abhay Charan De) to write books in English and travel to the West, and thus Prabhupāda inherited the openness to cultural adaptation that was his guru's trademark.

Prabhupāda sometimes compared his task to that of Hanumān, the monkey-hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whose mission was to reunite Rāma with his wife Sītā Devī.<sup>9</sup> Just as the terrible Rāvaṇa had kidnapped Sītā (considered a form of Lakṣmī, Goddess of wealth) for his own pleasure, modern civilization was employing wealth that rightfully belonged to God for its own hedonistic aims. The Krishna consciousness movement could reunite Sītā and Rāma through *yukta-vairāgya*, by using money, technology, and convenience in Krishna's service.

At other times Prabhupāda's approach to cultural encounter was less rec-



onciliatory. In a 1976 address to an international gathering at the birthplace of Śrī Chaitanya, in his society's world-headquarters in Mayapur, West Bengal, Prabhupāda polarized the audience with what he believed to be irreconcilable forces. "[W]e are trying to conquer over the demonic culture with this Vedic culture . . . If you want to make the human society happy, give them this culture of Kṛṣṇa consciousness" (*Collected Lectures* 1993: vol.XI:383). Prabhupāda's "demonic-culture" rhetoric, polarized against his strategy of sub-continental enculturation, must be seen in the context of a century of Hindu reverse-missionary discourse. Thomas Hopkins notes that unlike many exporters of India's spirituality, who made no effort to transport the cultural aspects, Bhaktivedanta Swami was "very, very concerned that the tradition be presented in its fullness, as it became more and more clear that the authentic tradition was irreplaceable, that the cultural tradition out of which Krishna consciousness came was essential to the purpose and practice of Krishna consciousness, and that any attempt to translate it into purely Western cultural terms might only serve to convolute it" (108). Looking back, we can now see what Hopkins at the time could not: Krishna consciousness, beyond its ethnically Indian trappings, has turned out to be cross-culturally hybrid.

A visit to any Hare Krishna temple will reveal this plainly. Although ISKCON devotees conduct most of their daily liturgy and ritual in Sanskrit or Bengali, English is still the language of choice for interpersonal communication, even within temples in India. In part, this may simply be due to the convenience of using English as a common language in a region where several languages are spoken. But English's privileged status also has to do with Prabhupāda's choice of the language for most of his books, public lectures, conversations, and letters. Indeed, disciples who traveled with Prabhupāda in India recall that at times he would prefer to deliver a lecture in English for their benefit, even when some in the audience could not understand.<sup>10</sup> Prabhupāda saw English as the emerging standard for international communication, and he was ready to adopt it for the purpose of mission.

Another locus of cultural blending in ISKCON is the weekly "Sunday Feast" service, an evening festival that is the main congregational event at many temples. The Sunday Feast began as a "Love Feast" in New York's Lower East Side, but was soon carried to all parts of the ISKCON world and adopted with suitable modifications for local culture. Although Prabhupāda taught his disciples how to cook traditional Indian festive food for



these events, the menu today varies considerably, depending on geographical location, the talents of the chef, and the preferences of the congregation. Many ISKCON temples are well known for their unique (and delicious) mix of east-west cooking styles and flavors.

Hopkins is right, however, in asserting that from the start Prabhupāda intended little compromise with his host's culture. As he told a well-wishing godbrother, he was not going to the West to learn how to use a knife and fork, nor change his dress style, nor alter his beliefs or practices (Goswami, S. vol.2:38). "My only credit is that I have not changed anything," was a favorite remark. His transparency, he analogized, was like that of a postman, a *via media* for the message delivered untampered. But as Marilyn Waldman has eloquently argued, expressions of fidelity, continuity, and solidarity with the past are not necessarily indications of stasis. Rediscovery of oldness for the purpose of envisioning a new, more ideal order can be a modality of change as much or more than radical discontinuity. For tradition, as one Gauḍīya scholar defines it, "is a dynamic ongoing process of connecting and reconnecting present with past as it nurtures faithful practitioners in their pursuit of an enriched devotional future" (see Valpey, in this same volume). While upholding tradition, Prabhupāda saw himself as a revolutionary fighting an age of decadent culture (Kali-yuga) by promoting an alternative culture, a harbinger of reform and renewal whose appeal lay in helping others uncover their primal consciousness, Krishna consciousness—a movement forward through return, by going "back to Godhead" (the title of ISKCON's bi-monthly journal).

At the same time, Prabhupāda's "traditionalism" could not have been successful had he not made significant accommodations to his host's culture by moving in ways that were radically discontinuous with Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. We mention two of the most significant here, each obvious instances of *Krishna of culture*. The first is the role of the guru *vis-a-vis* the Governing Body Commission or GBC, ISKCON's ultimate management authority. Prabhupāda introduced the GBC as an over-arching, democratic organizational structure under which the gurus must function, a type of checks and balances. While this can alleviate some of the dangers of what may happen when someone becomes the sole immediate presence of the Divine Will, it has been viewed by some as an institutional intrusion into the spiritual line. The concept of guru on the traditional Indian model is of "an inspired, charismatic, spiritual autocrat, an absolute and autonomously decisive authority, around whom an institution takes shape as the natural

extension and embodiment of his charisma" (dās, 25). But Prabhupāda was acutely aware of the dangers of premature spiritual leadership, and the frailties of human leaders. Thus, he told Tamal Krishna Goswami in 1977 with regard to ISKCON management, "No one of you alone but all of you together." Prabhupāda had witnessed his own guru's institution, the Gaudiya Math, break apart into several factions, each led by its own *ācārya*, although they had been asked by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī to form a GBC after his demise. Prabhupāda attributed the schism to his godbrothers' failure to abide by their guru's order.

Still, Prabhupāda's insistence on creating a Governing Body was more than just an attempt to ensure his movement's institutional stability. It was also an acknowledgement of the cultural environment in which his institution was operating, and of the need to adapt to its prevailing attitudes toward leadership and authority. In a letter dated October 13, 1969, prior to the GBC's establishment, Prabhupāda wrote Tamal Krishna Goswami:

I have seen the agenda of your presidents' meeting. This is nice. One thing should be followed, however, as your countrymen are more or less independent spirited and lovers of democracy. So everything should be done very carefully so that their sentiments may not be hurt. According to Sanskrit moral principles, everything has to be acted, taking consideration of the place, audience and time. As far as possible the centers should act freely, but conjointly. They must look forward to the common development. (1987:1054).

"Place, audience and time" were also important considerations for Prabhupāda in deciding the place of women in his society. Unlike his predecessors, Prabhupāda gave women a vital role in his mission. He established women's ashrams, gave women *gāyatrī mantra* initiation, made them priests in his temples, and counted among them many of his best preachers. In addition to the many ways women contributed, Prabhupāda credited his movement's success to their magnetic presence amidst the male members, nearly all of whom, he reasoned, would not have otherwise stayed. Still, orthodox Hindu circles objected to the change in traditional gender roles, and again Prabhupāda defended himself by explaining the requirements of the new cultural environment, with special reference to the needs of a missionary movement.

In this connection, *deśa-kāla-pātra* (the place, the time and the object) should be taken into consideration. Since the European and American boys

and girls in our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement preach together, less intelligent men criticize that they are mingling without restriction. In Europe and America boys and girls mingle unrestrictedly and have equal rights; therefore it is not possible to completely separate the men from the women. However, we are thoroughly instructing both men and women how to preach, and actually they are preaching wonderfully. Of course, we very strictly prohibit illicit sex. Boys and girls who are not married are not allowed to sleep together or live together, and there are separate arrangements for boys and girls in every temple. Gṛhasthas [householders] live outside the temple, for in the temple we do not allow even husband and wife to live together. The results of this are wonderful. Both men and women are preaching the gospel of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Lord Kṛṣṇa with redoubled strength. (1996:vol.1:685).<sup>11</sup>

Both management structure and gender roles have been centers of contention in ISKCON since Prabhupāda's demise. Much of the tension has revolved around determining the proper application of spiritual principles like equality, purity, and obedience to divine authority, in the face of varying cultural expectations arising from the mundane contingencies of a global institution. ISKCON has struggled to emulate its founder's balance between fidelity and flexibility, principle and practicality.<sup>12</sup>

Even so, devotees have found themselves at home amidst the blend and, sometimes, clash of cultures that is ISKCON. Prabhupāda's claim, "We are not spreading a religion. We are spreading a culture,"<sup>13</sup> is borne out by his followers' conversions.<sup>14</sup> More than individual transformations, their conversions are a reorientation toward culture if not a relocation in culture. It is also a swapping of cultures, or more accurately, a sharing of cultures. This symbiotic, two-way traffic of "old" and "new," of India and the West, makes purchase on the notion of exotic otherness. Klaus Klostermaier describes it paradoxically as "revolutionary conservatism" (99), A. L. Herman less appreciatively, as "fundamentalist Krishnaism" (137).

Few movements that are as Hindu in appearance as ISKCON claim not to be Hindu. Prabhupāda manages this by the theological finesse mentioned earlier: claiming the culture of India, Bengal, or Braj, in all its detail to be the historical replica of a transhistorical reality—Krishna's eternal abode. The term "Hindusim," indicating a kind of faith tied to the vicissitudes of an individual or a nation's history, cannot be synonymous with Krishna consciousness or *sanātana-dharma*, the constitutional condition of the eternal living entity. By emphasizing the universal, i.e., transcultural values pre-

sent within "Hinduism" while at the same resisting many of its associations, Prabhupāda attempts to expose as false the identification with what he saw as a human construct—Hinduism—while affiliating himself with whatever he believed was of lasting value within it.<sup>15</sup> This acceptance-in-rejection allows him, for example, to place value in the Hindu social system, especially in the ministerial role of *brāhmaṇas*, and at the same time reject the notion that such classification is based upon hereditary caste. Prabhupāda gave *gāyatrī mantra* initiation to his Western followers on the conviction that the universal value of good character—embodied in a *brāhmaṇa*—cannot be limited by its historically narrow application in Hinduism. While devaluation of caste identity has been a characteristic of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism since its beginnings,<sup>16</sup> Prabhupāda forced the theoretical debate about the possibility of foreign *brāhmaṇas* into an actual, public concern, by bringing his Western followers to India.<sup>17</sup> As it turns out, in this instance historical Hinduism has moved to realign itself with the transhistorical, for many Indians now see devotees as "legitimate religious specialists," accepting them in the role of priests, gurus, and pandits (Brooks 1995:79).<sup>18</sup>

If, as Prabhupāda claimed, his mission was one of cultural conquest, the disquieting metaphor of "warfare" as a modality of mission strikes a sensitive nerve now more than ever before. Perhaps we would all breathe easier if those waging war today would trade their weapons of mass destruction for mantras and books. Nevertheless, we hesitate to speculate how many have enjoyed "battling" aggressive Krishna devotees hawking their books at airports and parking lots across America. Devotees are often advised, not so subtly, "Why don't you go back to chanting on the streets?" What needs to be addressed is Prabhupāda's motive, as the commander and chief of ISKCON's mission, for pushing book sales relentlessly. Economic reasons aside, Prabhupāda inherited from his predecessors the conviction that printing and publishing was the key to the success of the mission. Written specifically for Western audiences, these translations reveal the text, not in isolation, but in the context of the devotional community and its rich history of commentaries and culture. They bridge the enormous gap that separates an audience entirely unfamiliar with Indian culture. Once the cultural context is clear, the theology becomes intelligible.

Prabhupāda's writing goes beyond the exegesis and word-for-word gloss that is typical of the Sanskrit commentarial style, for he continually strives to relate the characters and plot of the text to the cultural knowledge-bank of his audience. One of innumerable examples can be cited from the first

book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1.13.41), wherein Prabhupāda writes, "Beginning from Brahmāji, the leader of this universe, down to the insignificant ant, all are abiding by the order of the Supreme Lord. . . . Brahmā, Śiva, Indra, Candra, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira or, in modern history, Napoleon, Akbar, Alexander, Gandhi, Shubhash and Nehru all are servants of the Lord, and they are placed in and removed from their respective positions by the supreme will of the Lord. None of them is independent" (1993:vol.1:759). Here Prabhupāda establishes God's independent and unique nature by ruling out the closest contenders for his position amongst the classical pantheon. He then moves, however, from the world of scripture to (relatively) recent history, naming the "world-conquerors" of our own time and culture.

The dialectic between Krishna and culture has resonated with diverse audiences. *Krishna against culture* made sense to the 1960s and '70s counter-culture from which most of Prabhupāda's early followers came, galvanizing their disaffection with establishment society—its politics, economy, and social structures. The same strategy has struck a harmonious chord within the burgeoning Hindu diaspora who fearfully watch as their and their children's cultural ties to India falter before an unhalting march of globalization and secularity. The ecologically minded, searching for environmental solutions, have found Prabhupāda's back-to-basics, rural-life formula appealing. Those reared on Star Trek and its spin-offs may have recognized Prabhupāda as a fellow traveler when he reads them through the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s cosmographic imagery, nevermind that it flies in the face of mainstream science. Within the Hard Core rock music scene, Straight Edge bands and their admirers turn their backs on hedonism, religiously observing ISKCON's four prohibitions (abstinence from gambling, intoxication, illicit sex, and non-vegetarian foods). Karma, reincarnation, yoga, shaved heads and many other ISKCON beliefs and practices are now widely accepted. In all these culturally alternative models, what begins as *Krishna against culture* becomes *Krishna of culture*.

We have tried in this brief exercise to locate what proves to be Prabhupāda's (and by extension ISKCON's) unstable attitude towards Krishna and culture. If the thread of the argument seems never to settle on any one of the three alternatives—Krishna and culture's opposition, agreement, or both—this is because Prabhupāda himself remains ever attentive to the principle of utility—a Vaishnava version of "skillful means." At times he demonizes culture, draws the line and warns against crossing it. Then

again, he positions Krishna squarely on culture's side. But which culture is he speaking of or against? Modern Western culture and technology are recommended as often as the ancient ways of India; nor does he see them as necessarily opposed. Our conclusion is that he intentionally blurs the divide between Krishna and culture. In a tradition whose maxim is *acintya-bhedābheda* (inconceivable difference and identity simultaneously), the shifting play of Krishna and his infinite energies permits the cross-cultural pollination so essential to the success of Prabhupāda's mission.

### ENDNOTES

1. Prabhupāda composed this prayer in Bengali verse.
2. See, for example, Thomas J. Hopkins, "Interview with . . ." in *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna*, ed. Steven J. Gelberg, pp. 108-111.
3. Brian K. Smith argues strongly for the importance of theological tradition as an object of study for the historian of religion. "I agree with those scholars of religion, working in other traditions, who have identified theologians as the principal authorities of any given religious tradition and the theological endeavor as principally concerned with questions of definition, identity, and authority. . . . The theologians provide, from within a religion, the "glue" to an otherwise diverse set of data, "facts," sectarian differences, and all other particularities of any given tradition. They do internally what the outside scholar of the religion does from a nontheological standpoint." (744-45).
4. This was especially the case in Vrindavana, Krishna's birthplace, where Prabhupāda cautioned his disciples, "In the holy *dhāma*, if one of my disciples drinks from a jug incorrectly and he contaminates that jug, everyone will notice it. Don't be criticized for uncleanness, or I will be criticized. It is the duty of the disciple to follow these etiquette habits very austere. I am putting so much energy into this party in India because I want to train you how to live here" (Goswami, S.: vol.5: 29-30).
5. This distinctive theory of *śaktis* is based upon the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 6.7.61; for its explanation, see *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.6.154-61. See also *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.4-5.
6. One of the essential verses of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (2.9.33) states that the Lord alone existed before the creation. In his commentary, Prabhupāda explains that "the Lord alone" means the Lord with his people and paraphernalia. "The Vaikuṇṭha planets [the abode of Krishna] are full of transcendental variegatedness, including the four-handed residents of those planets, with great opulence of wealth and prosperity, and there are even airplanes and other amenities required for high-grade personalities. Therefore the Personality of Godhead exists before the creation, and He exists with all transcendental variegatedness in the Vaikuṇṭhalokas. . . . The existence of the Personality of Godhead implies the existence of the Vaikuṇṭhalokas, as the

existence of a king implies the existence of a kingdom.” (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, 1993: vol.2: 540-1).

7. Niebuhr divides the third alternative again into three.

8. Rūpa Gosvāmī, an important theologian of the school, defines *yukta-vairāgya* in his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (1.2.255):

*anāsaktasya viṣayān yathārham upayujñataḥ  
nirvandhaḥ kṛṣṇa-sambandhe yuktaṁ vairāgyamucyate*

Prabhupāda translates the verse as follows, “Things should be accepted for the Lord’s service and not for one’s personal sense gratification. If one accepts something without attachment and accepts it because it is related to Kṛṣṇa, one’s renunciation is called *yuktaḥ vairāgyam*.” (Purport to *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 8.12:8, vol.IX:430-1).

9. See, for example, Prabhupāda’s commentary on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 5.14.24 (1993:vol.6:497-8), and his lecture in London on August 6, 1973 (1991:vol.1:334).

10. See Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami, *Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, volume 1, chapter 9 and volume 5, chapter 37.

11. In a presentation delivered to ISKCON’s GBC, Yamunā Devī Dāsī relates her experiences as Prabhupāda’s first female disciple. She begins, “As a strong and independent young woman I met Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1966 and took initiation in 1967. Had Śrīla Prabhupāda demanded conformity to orthodox roles for women as a condition of surrender, I, along with many of my God sisters, would probably not have joined ISKCON. That he did not is testament to his spiritual vision. He lovingly encouraged and engaged us in the service of the *saṅkīrtana* movement, and he consistently revealed himself to be *paṇḍitaḥ sama-darśinaḥ*—equal to all.”

12. Scholars and practitioners alike have amply documented the struggles over authority, education, gender, and points of theology in the years following Prabhupāda’s departure. For a bibliography and historical overview of the issues, see Tamal Krishna Goswami, “Heresies of Authority and Continuity in the Hare Krishna Movement.”

13. Spoken by Prabhupāda to Bhurijana dāsa and told to Tamal Krishna Goswami in phone conversation, November 2001.

14. See, for example, Tamal Krishna Goswami, “Being Hindu in North America: The Experience of a Western Convert.”

15. Hṛdayānanda dāsa Goswami problematizes the term “Hinduism” by identifying two of its possible referents that would be unacceptable to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas: the neo-Advaita-Vedānta of Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, and others, and orthoprax brahmanism which insists on caste privilege (49-50).

16. Joseph O’Connell on pre-19th century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, “... the Vaiṣṇavas in Bengal did not place their religious commitment in the solidarity of the Hindu people, nor in the sacred ideals, if there were such, common to Hindus. Their religious faith was in Krishna, a mode of faith that in principle a non-Hindu could share.” (342).

17. Prabhupāda brought his first group of "dancing white elephants" (as he affectionately called his Western disciples) to India in 1970.

18. This, of course, is not true everywhere; ISKCON devotees (often even those born in India) are not allowed entrance into the Jagannātha temple in Puri, Orissa. See Charles R. Brooks' *Hare Krishnas in India*, for an account of ISKCON's place among Hindus in India.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brooks, Charles R. "The Blind Man Meets the Lame Man: ISKCON's Place in the Bengal Vaishnava Tradition of Caitanya Mahāprabhu." *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 6.2 (1998): 5-30.

———. *The Hare Krishnas in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

———. "Understanding ISKCON." *ISKCON Communications Journal* 3.2 (1995): 77-81.

Dās, Ravindra Svarūpa. "Cleaning House and Cleaning Hearts: Reform and Renewal in ISKCON, Part Two." *ISKCON Communications Journal* 4 (1994): 25-33.

Dasi, Yamuna Devi. "Women in ISKCON: Presentations to the GBC, March 2000." *ISKCON Communications Journal* 8.1 (2000).

Flood, Gavin. "Hinduism, Vaiṣṇavism, and ISKCON: Authentic Traditions or Scholarly Constructions?" *ISKCON Communications Journal* 3.2 (1995): 5-15.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Goswami, Hṛdayānanda Dāsa. "For Whom Does Hinduism Speak?" *ISKCON Communications Journal* 7.1 (1999): 45-53.

Goswami, Satsvarūpa dāsa. *Śrīla Prabhupāda-Līlāmṛta*. 6 vols. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1982-1983.

Goswami, Tamal Krishna. "Being Hindu in North America: The Experience of a Western Convert." *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*. Eds. C. Lamb, and D. Bryant. London: Cassell, 1999. 278-86.

———. "The Dance of the Dexterous Hermeneute: Transformation Vs. Continu-



ity: Tensions in Scriptural Transmission: Hermeneutical Strategies in the Commentaries of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda." *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 6.2 (1998): 61-72.

———. "Heresies of Authority and Continuity in the Hare Krishna Movement." *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 8.1 (1999): 103-48.

———. "The Perils of Succession: Heresies of Authority and Continuity in the Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement." *ISKCON Communications Journal* 5.1 (1997): 13-44.

———. "Servant of the Servant: A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness." *Dialogue and Alliance* 13.1 (1999): 5-17.

Harris, Marvin. *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999.

Herman, A.L. *A Brief Introduction to Hinduism: Religion, Philosophy and Ways of Liberation*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1991.

Hopkins, Thomas J. "Interview with Thomas J. Hopkins." *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna: Five Distinguished Scholars on the Krishna Movement in the West*. Ed. Steven J. Gelberg. New York: Grove Press, 1983. 101-61.

Klostermaier, Klaus K. "Will India's Past Be America's Future? Reflections on the Caitanya Movement and Its Potentials." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 15.1-2 (1980).

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper and Row, 1951.

O'Connell, Joseph T. "The Word 'Hindu' in Gauḍiṣya Vaiṣṇava Texts." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93.3 (1973): 340-3.

Prabhupāda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. *Collected Lectures on Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*. 7 vols. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1991.

———. *Collected Lectures on Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. 11 vols. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1993.

———. *Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*. 9 vols. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1996.

———. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. 18 vols. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1993.

———. *Letters From Śrīla Prabhupāda*. 5 vols. Culver City: The Vaiṣṇava Institute, 1987.

Smith, Brian K. "Who Does, Can, and Should Speak for Hinduism?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68.4 (2000): 741-9.

Valpey, Kenneth. "'A Tremendous Connection': Reflections on Tamal Krishna Goswami's Final Visit to Bhaktivedanta Manor." *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 11.2 (2003).

Waldman, Marilyn Robinson. "Tradition As a Modality of Change: Islamic Examples." *History of Religions* 25.4 (1986): 318-40.

## THE BLIND MAN MEETS THE LAME MAN: ISKCON'S PLACE IN THE BENGAL VAISHNAVA TRADITION OF CAITANYA MAHĀPRABHU\*

Charles R. Brooks

### Introduction

The Indian religious tradition of Caitanya Mahāprabhu has been a vital force in India since the early sixteenth century, exhibiting all the processes of flow and adaptation necessary for its persistence and continuity. The history of the movement initiated by Caitanya, known as the Bengal or Gauḍiṣya *sampradāya* (sect) attests not only to the solid foundations established by Caitanya and his immediate followers, but also to the tradition's ability to periodically produce inspired leaders capable of renewing and interpreting the doctrine and philosophy for exigencies of new social and cultural environments.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON or Hare Krishna Movement) is an example of the Gauḍiṣya *sampradāya*'s integrative vitality. Founded in the United States in 1966 by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, a 70-year-old Gauḍiṣya monk, ISKCON now has temples the world over, staffed by non-Indian Vaishnavas (worshippers of Vishnu). ISKCON is also well-established in India, its cultural homeland, where members are accepted as legitimate Gauḍiṣya Vaishnavas, and accorded high status by the general population (see Brooks 1985).

In this paper I will briefly discuss the development of Caitanya Vaish-

---

\*An earlier version of this paper appeared in Edmund Weber and Tilak Raj Chopra, eds., *Shri Krishna Caitanya and the Bhakti Religion* (Frankfurt, Germany, Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 37-60.

navism, emphasizing how residents of India have been able to rationalize the existence of ISKCON in light of the Caitanya sect's history, and accept it as part of that tradition in spite of the "Hindu"<sup>1</sup> tendency to exclude foreigners.<sup>2</sup> This has been possible due in large part to two factors:

- (1) The perception of Bhaktivedanta's achievements as fulfillment of the goals and prophecies of the Caitanya sampradāya. In this context his accomplishments are seen as an inevitable completion of the work started by his principle sectarian predecessors—Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, the Six Gosvāmīs, and Caitanya himself; and (2) the successful behavioral presentations of ISKCON devotees through which they have "proven" to the Indian population that pragmatically they are legitimate Vaishnavas possessing the necessary knowledge and purity for acceptance.

The data presented here were collected during two years of field work in India, most of it in the North Indian pilgrimage town of Vrindaban, the place where Caitanya's disciples, the "Six Gosvāmīs," codified the sect's doctrine, ritual and philosophy, and established its organizational headquarters. Today it is also the site of ISKCON's Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma temple with an associated entourage of about 100 foreign devotees.<sup>3</sup>

### Caitanya, the Six Gosvāmīs and Vrindaban

Today in Vrindaban there is a local organization—Śrī Vṛndāvana Svarūpotthān paribhāvanā—whose Hindi slogan is *Śrī Vṛndāvana dhāma ekvāna hai, nagar nahi* ("Vrindaban is a forest, not a city"). Though its members have never experienced the place as a true forest, they desire its return to the "original state," or at least the prevention of its further development. They argue that a pilgrimage to Vrindaban should be a wilderness experience as it must have been until about 500 years ago, when Caitanya initiated its development, and therefore see new development there by ISKCON and other parties as detrimental. Caitanya had a much different vision of the *Dhāma* (holy land), however, than the members of this modern organization.

Though it was never his intention to transform the place into a city, Caitanya and his followers took as their mission a development whereby the sacred sites of Krishna's *līlās* (sports, activities)<sup>4</sup> would become accessible objects of worship, where pilgrims would have adequate shelter during

their *yātra* (pilgrimage), and where proper temples for Krishna worship would be established. This in effect would open the Holy Dhāma to the masses, giving everyone the chance to receive its benefits. Concurrently, with the establishment of a permanent and flourishing Vaishnava community created around the Six Gosvāmīs and their disciples, Vrindaban was to become the main organizational and intellectual center for the new religion.

These goals reflected the underlying structure of Caitanya's movement, and its social implications were revolutionary. Access to God and the liberation which religion should provide was for Caitanya not limited to *Brāhmaṇas* and those who had renounced society (*sādhus*). Since religious emotions were for him superior to complex ritual, religion was therefore not dependent upon esoteric knowledge or education—things only available to the upper classes. As Hopkins has pointed out, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (a primary Vaishnava text describing Krishna's life and activities) insists that religion should not be based upon qualifications of birth or status; that a person's class should be determined by the characteristics he innately possesses or develops (Hopkins 1966: 11, 18).

Likewise, the benefits of living in Vrindaban—a guarantee of salvation (*mokṣa*)—should be available to all. Even if a person could not permanently reside there, which was the ideal, at least he could come, stay for a while, leaving refreshed and purified, confident that a start had been made on the path to spiritual perfection.

Presently Vrindaban is a town of about 30,000 residents, with an influx of as many as 100,000 on the main festival days. Over the years it has grown in its capacity to handle visitors, but basically the sacred complex remains the same as it was after the initial development of the Bengal Vaishnavas. In 1925 Kennedy wrote:

...the development at Brindaban was the direct result of Chaitanya's own action. To all Vaishnavas, Mathura and Brindaban are holy sites because of their connection with the legends of Krishna. To a devotee of Radha-Krishna the scenes of Krishna's lilas at Brindaban must ever be of supreme sanctity (1925: 65).

It was later commented that:

The recovery of the sacred sites of Vrindaban by the Bengal Vaishnavas and its erection into one of the religious centers of Northern India form

one of the most interesting events in the history of medieval Vaishnavism; for the modern Vrindaban, eclipsing today the glory of the adjacent city of Mathura by its fine temples, groves, seminaries, bathing ghats, is the creation chiefly of Bengal Vaishnavism (1961: 65).

There are three early biographies of Caitanya that form the primary sources of information for his life: *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, completed in 1542 by Kavi-karṇapūra, nine years after Caitanya's death; Vṛndāvana dās's *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, with a date no later than 1548; and the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāj, completed in 1615 (Dates from De 1961: 43, 48, 56).<sup>5</sup> From these sources we know that at least from his early adult life, Caitanya had formulated the idea of visiting and perhaps residing in Vrindaban.

Born in 1486, by the age of sixteen his hagiographers indicate that Caitanya was already considered a *paṇḍita* (scholar-teacher) and had his own *śol* (school) with a large number of students. During this early period he developed a reputation as a scholar in his hometown of Navadvīp, which was then considered one of the primary seats of learning in Bengal. At this stage his behavior was suited to the academic status that he held, exhibiting no displays of religious fervor, though biographers do comment upon his forceful personality and physical beauty.

At the age of twenty-two, however, a marked change occurred in Caitanya's life as a result of a pilgrimage to Gayā taken in order to perform the *śrāddha*, or funeral rites, for his father. There he met the well-known guru, Īśvara Purī, who, according to Vidyārthi (1961: 69), was the leading religious figure in Gayā, and *jati-guru* of the Gayawals, hereditary priests of the town. For reasons not entirely clear, Caitanya was initiated by Īśvara Purī with a Krishna mantra, and this apparently transformed him from a dignified teacher into a Krishna-intoxicated ecstatic.

According to the legend, the content of Caitanya's teaching shifted from the subtleties of Sanskrit grammar to discourses about the glories of Krishna. His school soon folded and a career as scholastic *paṇḍita* came to an early end. Though modern scholars are reluctant to classify Caitanya as a great intellect, his biographers and followers emphasize this early period as evidence of a highly developed rationality which, in spite of his ecstatic trances, would win many converts by logical debate, and serve him well as organizer of a significant new religious movement.

Yet it was his ecstatic personality which attracted the attention of established Vaishnavas of Navadvīp who quickly formed around him, creating

the nucleus of a Caitanya cult. At this time Caitanya began to conduct *sankīrtana* (public chanting) sessions in private homes. This congregational chanting, accompanied by musical instruments, dancing, and sometimes trance states inspired by Caitanya's own ecstasies, is often cited as his main contribution to modern Indian religion, and it soon swept the entire town into a revivalistic fervor. In fact, *Sankīrtana* became so popular, and Caitanya became such a celebrity, that these meetings were not long confined to private homes, but soon spilled out into the streets.

*Sankīrtana* so disrupted the normal life of Navadvīp that the town's Muslim administration attempted to bar these public performances, but the restrictions ultimately had an opposite effect. In response, Caitanya organized massive *nagar-kīrtanas* (*kīrtanas* involving the entire town), parading through the streets in a jubilant but organized defiance, which some have cited as the original model for Gandhi's non-violent civil disobedience campaigns (Chakravarti 1975: 35). The *kazī* (Muslim chief administrator) was supposedly won over by the sincerity of the masses and charm of their leader, subsequently authorizing *nagar-kīrtanas* by official proclamation.

Although it is usually argued that Caitanya did not consciously initiate a movement, he apparently realized the significance of events occurring around him and began to take the role of religious leader seriously. It was his eventual decision, therefore, to enter the renounced order of life (*sannyāsa*), the status most suitable for guruship. Caitanya's biographers depict this as a reluctant decision, since it entailed leaving his family behind, but he nevertheless felt it was an essential step. By becoming a *sannyāsī*, he automatically acquired increased legitimacy and respect; moreover, since for the *sannyāsī* normal behavioral constraints are considerably relaxed, he could indulge in ecstasies without being severely judged.

So, at the age of twenty-four, Caitanya became a *sannyāsī* through initiation from Keśava Bhārati and was given the name Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya, or "one who awakens the spirit of Krishna in the heart."<sup>6</sup> From the time of his *dīkṣā* (mantra initiation) from Īśvara Purī, Caitanya had experienced trances wherein he would assume the mood of the *gopīs* (cowherd girls) of Vrindāban, imagining that he was with Krishna along the banks of the Yamunā River. It was natural for him, therefore, after being freed of family responsibilities, to decide to go to Vrindāban with the intent of establishing his hermitage there. However, due to the supplications of his mother, Caitanya established his base of operations closer to home at Jagannāth Purī in Orissa, and from there embarked on pilgrimages throughout India, one of

which would finally take him to Vrindaban in 1515.

Caitanya probably had in mind the establishment of some type of center at Vrindaban from the beginning of his religious activities. Both his *dīkṣā* and *sannyāsa* gurus were in fact disciples of Mādhavendra Purī, a Vaishnava who himself had propagated Krishna *bhakti* and foreseen the importance of Vrindaban to a revitalized Vaishnavism. Some writers would even give Mādhavendra Purī credit for initiating the movement which Caitanya would eventually inspire. Kennedy states that some fifty years before Caitanya, Mādhavendra had

...turned the thoughts of Bengal Vaishnavas toward the sacred sites of Vrindaban. He had established a small temple there and installed two Bengali priests as its custodians (1925: 65).

This temple (actually at nearby Govardhan), established for the worship of a Krishna image called Śrīnāthji, was later taken over and claimed by the Vallabha Sampradāya. Nonetheless, the image's "discovery" is credited to Mādhavendra, and it is indeed quite possible that Caitanya received some form of direct instructions concerning Vrindaban from his own gurus.

It is certainly Caitanya, however, who should receive most credit for the development of Vrindaban. Although his initial plans for travelling to Braj (the linguistic and cultural area around Vrindaban) were cancelled at his mother's request, Caitanya deputized a close friend and follower, Lokanātha, to go and live in Vrindaban, instructing him to discover and reclaim the sacred sites of Krishna's activities. According to Kapoor (1977: 29), Lokanātha met with such success that by the time Caitanya arrived there in 1515, he was able to show his master many of the most significant locations. Lokanātha is also credited with the founding of one temple, Gokulānanda, and the initiation of one disciple, Narottama Dās, who would become an important figure in the movement's second generation.

After settling at Purī and completing a difficult pilgrimage to South India, Caitanya finally felt that the time was right to embark on his long-desired visit to Vrindaban. So in 1514, just after the finish of the rainy season, he embarked for the land of Krishna by way of Bengal. Caitanya was accompanied by a large entourage at the insistence of the king of Orissa, who had by this time fallen under his spell. In fact, Caitanya was designated as "state god" of Orissa by the king (Das 1978: 137).

At Ramkeli, Caitanya met two brothers, Sakar Malik and Dabir Khas, who were officials in the Muslim government of Hussain Shah, the



nawab of Bengal. These men would become, after their conversion and initiation by Caitanya, two of his most important disciples—Sanātana and Rūpa Gosvāmī. When Sanātana saw the royal entourage, he suggested to Caitanya that travelling in such a manner was improper for a *sannyāsī*, and the master evidently agreed. So Caitanya returned to Purī, and after an additional four months, started off for Vrindaban again, this time with only one *Brāhmaṇa* attendant named Balabhadra.

Although it is the opinion of some of his detractors that Caitanya never actually went to Vrindaban, most scholars agree (Kennedy 1925; Majumdar 1969; De 1961; Dimock 1966, Vaudeville 1976; Kapoor 1977) that his biographers and the oral tradition are essentially correct in their accounts. Following that assumption, we note that Caitanya finally reached Braj, and after visiting Mathurā, set out for Vrindaban proper; his entry into Vrindaban is a story relished and often told by Caitanyaites today. Kennedy remarks:

At Mathura, which is associated with Brindaban in the sacred legends of Vaishnavism, Chaitanya visited all the holy sites at twenty four different ghats. All the while, as he approached the scenes of Krishna's exploits, his emotions grew in intensity, until his companions became fearful of the results. Even the neck of a peacock was sufficient to send him into a swoon, the dark colors reminding him of Krishna. On catching sight of Govardhan Hill, near Brindaban, he was so affected that he threw himself on the ground, clasping the very rocks in a frenzy. Finding two shallow pools in a rice field he bathed in them rapturously, thinking them the pool where Krishna dallied with Radha in the water. In this manner he visited all the holy sites round Brindaban, as far as they were discovered (*op. cit.* 47).

### **Bhaktivedanta Swami, ISKCON's founder, and his translation of Krishna**

Dasa's *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* relates Chaitanya's entry into Vrindaban in this manner:

The Lord's ecstatic love increased a thousand times when He visited Mathurā, but increased a hundred thousand times when He wandered in the forests of Vṛndāvana. When Śrī Caitanya was elsewhere, the very name of Vṛndāvana was sufficient to increase His ecstatic love. Now, when He was actually travelling in the Vṛndāvana forest, His mind was absorbed in great ecstatic love day and night. He ate and bathed simply Out of habit (Bhaktivedanta 1975: 125).

During his Vrindaban stay, Caitanya was constantly entranced, and in that state he designated the loations of the legendary Rādhākund and Śyāmākund, ponds where Krishna is said to have swam and played with the *gopīs*. This, according to Majumdar (1969: 208), was the most significant event during Caitanya's visit, an accomplishment which his deputies had failed to achieve. This "psychic" discovery evidently gave considerable impetus to the religion's further development in Vrindaban, and the subsequent excavation and development of the Rādhākund area produced one of the most important *tīrthas* (pilgrimage sites) established there by the Bengalis, becoming a popular residence for many of them.

Not only are the "rediscovered" sites of Kṛṣṇa-līlā important pilgrimage destinations today, but the places that mark Caitanya's visit to Vrindaban are objects of adoration as well. Akrūra ghat, where he resided for that period, and Āmli-talā, the tamarind tree under which he would do his daily chanting, are especially revered. But at every place Caitanya travelled around Vrindaban he was plagued by huge crowds seeking his *darśana* (audience, sacred sight) and blessing, indicating that by this time his fame had already spread far outside his native Bengal and adopted Orissa. These throngs concerned his companions, who felt that their master's safety was threatened by them, and he was finally convinced to reluctantly leave Vrindaban earlier than planned.

On the return journey to Purī, Caitanya stopped at Allahabad (Prayag) and Varanasi (Benares). At these locations he held discourses with Rūpa and Sanātana respectively, not only commissioning them to develop the sect's written codes, but transmitting detailed knowledge concerning what should be contained in them. These two brothers would become regarded as great scholars, poets, and saints of the movement through their efforts at implementing Caitanya's Vrindaban vision "to revive it as a Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage center and as a headquarters for the movement, to build temples for the worship of Rādhā and Krishna, and to establish a scholastic and literary community there for the production of a systematic theology" (Goswami in Gelberg 1983: 232).

Therefore, by the year 1516, Vrindaban had been prepared by the renaissance of Lokanātha and had received the first two of the "Six Gosvāmīs" that Caitanya would send there. It can also be assumed that by this time others had already settled there as well, and that a small community was beginning to form.

Although Vrindaban could have still been little more than a forest settle-

ment of ascetics at this point, since we know from the biographies that Rūpa and Sanātana both travelled to Mathurā and neighboring villages daily to beg for food, the foundations had been laid for a significant religious movement centered around the ecstatic personality of Caitanya and his teachings concerning man's eternal relationship with Krishna. Soon, Rūpa and Sanātana were joined by the other Gosvāmīs, bringing their number up to the full complement of six. The others were Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, a South Indian *Brāhmaṇa* who Caitanya probably encountered on his pilgrimage there; Raghunātha Dās, a companion of the master at Purī, who came to Vrindaban after Caitanya's death; Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, who came to Vrindaban after the death of his parents, having been recruited by Caitanya at Varanasi; and Jīva, nephew of Rūpa and Sanātan Gosvāmī and premiere philosopher of the movement.

Present-day Vrindaban, with its many ashrams, temples, and *dharmśālās* (guest houses), still holds for the Indian people the image of a rural forest where the demands of everyday life can be left behind and where a personal experience of Krishna is still possible. The temple complex established by ISKCON is seen, especially by those of the Gauḍiya sampradāya, as continuing in the spirit of Caitanya and the Six Gosvāmīs. The foreign Vaishnavas have built, using their modern resources, a place which attracts yet another class of people. For the westernized, urban Indian, ISKCON has opened up the Dhāma as never before, it being likely that any businessman, politician, or government official who comes to Vrindaban will stay at the Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma guest house.

ISKCON's role in the town's continual development is seen by most as an integral part of its broader role in the spread of Krishna *bhakti*. On numerous occasions in Vrindaban, I was reminded that in the *purāṇas* and other scriptures<sup>7</sup> it is prophesied that *bhakti* would eventually spread to countries other than India. That the actualization of this prophesy culminates in a significant presence of foreign devotees is therefore not surprising to Indian residents, but rather a historical fulfillment of scriptural prediction.

The Bengal Vaishnavas, then, have since their inception been intent upon developing Vrindaban into a pilgrimage town where people could visit all the important places of Krishna *līlā*. Imbibing this attitude from his preceptors, Bhaktivedanta Swami dreamed of continuing the tradition of increasing accessibility of the Dhāma to more and more people. He especially foresaw the phenomenon of western devotees as an inevitable fulfillment of Caitanya's mission to the world. Furthermore, if the urbanized

Indians who were becoming more materialistic witnessed the conversion of Americans to Vaishnavism, and had an "international quality" place to stay in the Dhāma, he reasoned that they too would come there on pilgrimage.

A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami is ISKCON's undeniable link to the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava tradition, but before considering his importance in the spread of this religion to the west, it is necessary to look at two other figures—Bhaktivīnoda Ṭhākura, and his son, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, who was the guru of ISKCON's founder—for it is they who are responsible for revitalizing the tradition after a lacuna of more than a century, and interpreting it as a universal religion that should be internationally expansionist in scope. It is their spirit of revivalism and expansionism that ISKCON appropriated and continues.

### **Bhaktivīnoda Ṭhākura and the western expansion of Caitanyaism**

Born in 1838, Bhaktivīnoda received an English education and graduated from a Christian college. On his own the Ṭhākura studied law, and after passing the law examinations became a civil servant with the government of Bengal where his responsibilities included overseeing the large Jagannātha temple at Purī in Orissa, a position that he held until retirement in 1894. As a result of his training and employment in the British system, Bhaktivīnoda was well-versed in western philosophy and Christianity, imbibing the prevalent attitude of his day that Indian religion and philosophy was somehow inferior.

However, he soon developed a keen interest in the Vaiṣṇava tradition and sought to learn more about its subtleties in order to compare the two systems. With much difficulty he finally obtained then hard-to-find copies of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in 1868, and this was a transformative event for him. He was surprised and overwhelmed to find the depth of philosophical and theological teachings presented by these two key Vaiṣṇava scriptures, and soon dedicated himself to actively promoting the religion, an effort that led to a revitalization of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the religion initiated by Caitanya had lost its ecstatic zeal and had come to be primarily identified with one of its off-shoots, the Sahajiyā sect. Tracing their inheritance to Caitanya, the Sahajiyās integrated tantric aspects into their spiritual practices, and ritual sexual intercourse was primary among these. A Gauḍiya Maṭha publication states:

Vaishnavism was almost abandoned by the educated section of people. Its literature was hardly read. Kirtana was looked upon not as a form of prayer, but as means of gratification by people of loose morals. Most of the Vaishnava followers of the period lost their high standard of morality; they ceased to love asceticism, intellectual superiority and devotional fervour, which were the main characteristics of the previous Vaishnava masters. (Yati 1978: 39)

In this context, Bhaktivinoda burst upon the scene, translating the Vaishnava texts into various languages, including English, writing his own commentaries, and founding a journal to disseminate the teachings of Caitanya to a broad public. Another accomplishment for which he is also noted is the "rediscovery" of Caitanya's birthplace, which apparently had been "lost" or forgotten over the years. Just as Caitanya had mystically rediscovered the places of Krishna's activities in Vrindaban, Caitanya's birthplace was revealed to Bhaktivinoda in a vision. Planning to move to Vrindaban after his retirement, he was dissuaded by the celestial voice of Caitanya himself, saying, "There is much work left out in Gauḍamaṇḍal (the area in Bengal where Caitanya lived) to be done by you. Refrain from going to Vrajamaṇḍal (the place of Krishna's activities)" (Yati 1978: 33). What happened after that is narrated by Bhaktivinoda in his life history:

Thereafter every Saturday I visited Navadvip and enquired about the places connected with my Prabhu (Gaurāṅga) but the local people knew nothing, steeped as they were in their own selfishness. One night I got upon the roof of the house. It was at about 10 o'clock at night. While the sky was heavily clouded, I saw towards the North on the bank of the Ganges a palace-like building beautifully illuminated. Next morning I once again observed that palace from the roof and found a tall palm tree marking the spot...On enquiry the grand old man of the place informed me that that was the Birth-place of Śrīmaṇ Mahāprabhu. (Ibid. 33)

Being a man of letters, Bhaktivinoda realized that the general population would not accept his vision as valid proof that this site was indeed Caitanya's birthplace. Therefore, he carefully researched all available maps, records, government documents, and scriptural descriptions for verification until he had compiled a convincing argument that corroborated his vision. In 1894 a public meeting was held where Bhaktivinoda's research was accepted by historians and government officials as valid. On that site

Bhaktivinoda then constructed a temple, which is still there today.

Besides this accomplishment, which had the effect of revitalizing interest in the worship of Caitanya throughout Bengal, Bhaktivinoda was also a prolific writer, publishing books, articles, and periodicals in Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, and English. His intent was to widely disseminate the religion of Caitanya. He wrote, "Oh, for that day when the fortunate English, French, Russian, German and American people will take up banners, *mṛdaṅgas* and *kar-tālas* and raise *kīrtana* through their streets and towns. When will that day come? (in Goswami 1983: 189)" Some of his English essays were also sent to colleges and universities in the West, where they have been on library shelves since at least 1896.<sup>8</sup> As Hopkins has pointed out:

It was he, more than anyone else, who made possible the resurgence of Gauḍīya Vaishnavism in late nineteenth-century India, and it was he who set in motion the chain of events that led to the establishment of the Krishna consciousness movement in America in the next century. (in Gelberg 1983: 121)

While Bhaktivinoda indeed laid the groundwork for the resurgence and spread of Caitanyaism, it was his son Bimalā Prasād, later known as Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, who took the helm after his father's death in 1914. Bhaktisiddhānta would found the Gauḍīya Maṭha, a monastic and preaching organization, establish temples throughout India and in some foreign countries, and initiate a new generation of Caitanyaite disciples, including Bhaktivedānta Swami.

### Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and Gauḍīya Maṭha

Bhaktivinoda refused to acknowledge caste distinctions and had burned the physical signs of his upper-class status, including the "sacred thread" (*upanāyana*). His son internalized this anti-caste belief from his father and other Vaishnava paṇḍits during his childhood, gradually taking over with organizational efficiency the movement that Bhaktivinoda inspired. Well-versed in all the Vaishnava scriptures and in the commentaries of the Mādhva and Rāmānuja schools, as well as his own Caitanya sampradāya, Bhaktisiddhānta argued convincingly that Caitanya had preached a pure Vedic philosophy and religion. And just as his father had done, Bhaktisiddhānta preached the paramount belief that status was dependent not upon birth, but upon the quality of one's devotion to Krishna.

In 1900, Bhaktisiddhānta took initiation from an illiterate holy man, Gaurakiśora Dāsa Bābāji, whom his father had known and respected for many years, in order to balance his scholarly nature with pure devotion; upon Bhaktivinoda's death in 1914, he actively began to structure an organization that would continue his father's goals. His first step was to establish a printing press for the dissemination of his own writings. Many times during the remainder of his life, Bhaktisiddhānta would emphasize that writing and publication were the primary tools for preaching at that time in history, a principle that Bhaktivedānta Swami would continue to follow.

Interestingly enough, Bhaktisiddhānta utilized a symbolism to de-emphasize caste that was just the reverse of his father's. Rather than insist upon the removal of caste indicators, he insisted that anyone properly trained in devotional service was in fact a *Brāhmaṇa*, and deserving to wear the sacred thread. He therefore instituted a system of initiation whereby his disciples would be awarded the sacred thread, in essence transforming them into *Brāhmaṇas*, regardless of their birth-status. This practice was taken one step further by Bhaktivedānta when he began initiating his own western disciples as *Brāhmaṇas*.

Until his death in 1937, Bhaktisiddhānta travelled throughout India, opening temples personally or through his disciples. He also sent disciples to England, Germany, and Japan, where small missions were started, but ultimately they enjoyed little success. The Gauḍīya Maṭha was the first organized Vaishnava monastic institution and received criticism for tampering with the established "system," especially from the hereditary priests in Gauḍīya Vaishnava temples, since they perceived it as a threat to their superior status. Eventually, however, it became accepted that the Gauḍīya Maṭha was another branch of the religious tree that Caitanya had planted, and today is recognized as such.

After Bhaktisiddhānta's death—as often happens with a movement centered upon a charismatic personality—there arose disputes concerning ownership of Gauḍīya Maṭha properties and distribution of his spiritual and institutional authority. To this day some of the disputes have still not been resolved, and the once unified Maṭha is now divided into factions—a state of affairs that has tarnished its reputation for many. Although he was initiated by Bhaktisiddhānta in 1932, Bhaktivedānta was not involved in these power struggles, but instead set out to work alone for the implementation of his guru's instruction.

Resultantly, some of Bhaktivedānta's "god-brothers" (other disciples of



Bhaktisiddhānta) have found many things to criticize about the method and content of ISKCON. In the final analysis, however, it has been difficult for them to find solid ground for the criticism of Bhaktivedānta, for it appears that he, out of all of them, was capable of fulfilling their guru's ultimate dreams, adapting the religion for a western context without deviating from the teachings or spirit of instruction. In fact, it is interesting to note that those Indians today most critical of ISKCON base their criticisms not upon that movement's peculiarities, but rather upon its Gauḍīya Maṭha inheritance; a fact that only increases its traditional legitimacy among other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

### Bhaktivedānta and ISKCON

Present-day pilgrims and visitors to the birthplace of Caitanya at Mayapur in Bengal and to the site of Krishna's childhood at Vrindaban cannot escape the presence of ISKCON and its founder A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami. It is not inaccurate to say that Bhaktivedānta has had an impact upon the modern revitalization of these two important places of Hindu pilgrimage similar to the ones Bhaktivinoḍa and Caitanya respectively did in their own times. While his god-brothers were trying to legally resolve the institutional problems brought about by their guru's death, having resigned himself to the fact that they could provide no collective support for implementing the vision of an international Caitanya movement, Bhaktivedānta retreated to Vrindaban to contemplate how he could fulfill the mission alone.

Born in 1896, he was raised in a Vaiṣṇava family and exhibited religious inclinations at a very early age. At five he started his own Ratha-yātrā,<sup>9</sup> and at six was worshipping his own images of Rādhā-Krishna. Bhaktivedānta studied English and economics at Scottish Churches' College in Calcutta, after which he moved his family to Allahabad and started the Prayag Pharmacy. In 1928 he first encountered members of the Gauḍīya Maṭha and in 1932 was initiated as a disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. At every meeting with Bhaktisiddhānta and in letters, his guru encouraged Bhaktivedānta to write and spread Krishna consciousness to the West, a command that was not fully realized until old age. In 1944, however, Bhaktivedānta began an English periodical, *Back to Godhead*, and in 1953 formally instituted the "League of Devotees" in an attempt to create an organization for preaching the message of Caitanya. Yet, he could not devote full time to these activities because of business and family obligations.



Finally, in September of 1956, having left his family and societal responsibilities behind, he moved to Vrindaban to pursue the English translation, commentary, and publication of pertinent scriptural texts, especially *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; and to meditate upon how his guru's order to disseminate the message of Caitanya could best be fulfilled. Vrindaban was Bhaktivedanta's main residence from that time until he embarked on his journey to the United States on August 13, 1965 (dates from Goswami, Satsvarūpa 1980a).

Current Vrindaban residents remember Bhaktivedanta from this period, but few suspected that he would be successful in implementing his dreams; he was only one *sādhu* among many living in the town. The head priest (*mahant*) at one temple, acknowledging that he had perhaps "misjudged" Bhaktivedanta's potential, nevertheless points out the calm determination that the Swami showed even in the late 1950s:

Prabhupāda (the name by which Bhaktivedanta's disciples refer to him) was always trying to set up speaking engagements whenever there was some special event here. He was very persistent, but we always found some way to politely refuse. I took him as a bother, really. He Spoke some English and wanted to speak in that medium, but our devotees spoke Bengali or Hindi, so what was the use? Yes, he would go on and on about how this industrialist or that wealthy person would sponsor his mission to America, but to me it was a child's fantasy—very innocent and improbable.

This priest, well known throughout India, now reflects back on Bhaktivedanta's success with an explanation that has become very popular in Vrindaban:

He was not capable then of mounting such a movement. His intentions were there, but so naive I thought. So how he was successful? This is the secret: On his voyage you know he received two attacks of the heart, it is said. But this was Krishna's work. This was Krishna entering Prabhupāda for empowerment. So Krishna empowered, so how he can fail? It is like this. Krishna observed, "Oh, here is this old man that is determined, so I will use, I will give the power." Of course, only real saint may receive, so now we must admit he is saint. Such amazing success that thrilled all Vrindaban. But to have thought this old *sādhu bābā*... [laughing]

Others, especially in the merchant community, now proudly describe their early recognition of Bhaktivedanta's "power," although some of their

friends laugh and remind them that at the time they were not so convinced.

But Bhaktivedanta's persistence paid off. After being rejected by many potential backers, he finally convinced Mrs. Sumati Morarji, head of Scindia Steamship Lines, to provide him free passage from Calcutta to New York on board the freight steamer *Jaladuta*. On August 13, 1965 Bhaktivedanta Swami left Calcutta for the 26-day ocean voyage. Along the way his diary entries reflect a deep attachment to Vrindaban. On September 10 he wrote:

I feel better today, but I am feeling separation from Sri Vrindaban and my Lords Sri Govinda, Gopinath, Radha Damodar. The only solace is Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita in which I am tasting the nectarine of Lord Chaitanya's lila. I have left Bharatbhumi just to execute the order of Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati in persuance of Lord Chaitanya's order. I have no qualification, but I have taken up the risk just to carry out the order of His Divine Grace. I depend fully on Their mercy, so far away from Vrindaban. (in Goswami 1980a: 3)

After one month's stay in Butler, Pennsylvania with the son of an Indian patron who arranged for initial sponsorship in the United States, Bhaktivedanta moved to New York, where he stayed for a time with Dr. Ramamurti Misra, a teacher of *hatha-yoga* to a decidedly upscale clientele. While Dr. Misra treated the Swami with respect, they were on opposite ends of the Indian philosophical spectrum,<sup>10</sup> and Bhaktivedanta's desire was to be independent so that he could preach his own form of *bhakti-yoga*. It soon became apparent to Bhaktivedanta that the people most interested in him were not the well-to-do Westside clients of Dr. Misra, but the "bohemian" types whose lifestyles were in sharp contrast to those attracted to *hatha-yoga*. It was members of this bohemian group, not even known as "hippies" at this time, that persuaded Bhaktivedanta to join them.

Soon Bhaktivedanta was indeed free to preach out on his own. After two months of sharing small spaces in the lofts of sympathetic "hip" friends in New York's "Bowery" district—an experience that was inconvenient for all parties concerned—he finally moved to Second Avenue in the "East Village," where the International Society for Krishna Consciousness first got off the ground. In a storefront apartment that displayed the sign "Matchless Gifts," a survival from a curiosity shop that had previously occupied the building, Bhaktivedanta soon added another that announced "International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Inc.; A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami;

Lectures on the Bhagavad Gita; Krishna As He Is; Daily Morning Class 7 A.M." It was now July, 1966, and with a group of sympathizers who knew little about the Swami's ideas and ambitions, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness was officially incorporated as a tax-exempt religious organization.

By the summer of 1966, thousands of young people disenchanted with middle-class American culture were walking the streets of the East Village and occupying most of the available housing. It was the first wave of the Hippie movement, and they were actively searching for an alternative. Bhaktivedanta found them the most receptive group that he encountered in his 10 months in the United States, and on September 8, the day celebrated that year as Krishna's birthday, the Swami asked the small group that had formed around him to fast; the next day he initiated his first eleven disciples in a ceremony that none of them understood very well. The previous year Bhaktivedanta had marked Krishna's birth alone at sea, and now he had a small temple in New York City, the curious interest of the entire East Village community, and a small group of disciples; he felt that his mission to spread Krishna Consciousness to the West had truly begun.

When one of his first disciples moved to San Francisco and sent a ticket with the message that he and his wife had rented a storefront in Haight-Ashbury for a Rādhā-Krishna temple, Bhaktivedanta decided to join them immediately. This shocked his East Village devotees, who had come to think of him as their own, and of ISKCON as an East Village phenomenon. But the Swami saw it as only the small beginning of a world-wide movement. So, in January 1966, Bhaktivedanta arrived at San Francisco airport as 50 greeters, including Allen Ginsberg, who had been a frequent visitor to the East Village temple, chanted "Hare Krishna." Although Ginsberg disagreed about many of the Swami's required prohibitions, he had encountered the Hare Krishna mantra in India and often sung it publicly as part of his eclectic philosophy. He was enchanted that now a real swami was trying to spread "his" mantra in America and enjoyed Bhaktivedanta's company despite their differences. Bhaktivedanta himself was glad to receive the publicity and support provided by one of the main figures of the counterculture, tolerating the misconceptions and bad habits of this countercultural hero just as he did with most of his early followers.

Bhaktivedanta's fame and the popularity of the Haight-Ashbury temple continued to grow, and the Swami became a cult hero to segments of the hippie community, whether or not they appreciated the details of his phi-

losophy and lifestyle restrictions that he suggested. The mantra and dancing he taught had been adopted by all levels of the counterculture there; it at least provided a loose commonality for the hippies' often chaotic eclecticism. More than once "Hare Krishna" had transformed a violent scene into one of reconciliation. Even the Hell's Angels respected the Swami and his chanting defused violence that they had instigated on several occasions.

The group of core devotees continued to grow. More initiations were held with individuals and couples committing full time to the movement that Bhaktivedanta continued to implement. He introduced the worship of Jagannāth deities, perhaps the most abstract, bizarre-looking images in popular Hinduism, and gave the name "New Jagannāth Puri" to the San Francisco center; these images immediately became a psychedelic hit. The Swami knew that he would be highly criticized in India for not up-holding the proper standards of purity and ritual stricture, but he was firmly convinced that it was all Krishna's plan and prayed that Krishna would forgive the offenses taking place in His temple.

All this had happened in the space of two-and-a-half months from his arrival in San Francisco, and again the Swami was encouraged that his mission was continuing to be successful. But the devotees in New York were spiritual neophytes and needed his personal guidance, and they begged him to return there. Moreover, they had proven to be incompetent in handling the financial operation, which included plans to buy a larger building, so his presence was definitely needed in New York for a while. With his new followers in tears, Bhaktivedanta Swami left San Francisco and returned to New York.

Shortly after his return to New York, Bhaktivedanta suffered a mild heart attack and was hospitalized. He had told the devotees simply to chant and pray that he be saved since the mission was not finished, and chanting went on around the clock on both coasts. Alienated by the modern medical treatment he received in the hospital, the Swami talked of returning to India, Vrindaban, for Ayurvedic treatment (the indigenous Indian medical system) and to benefit from sun and heat. He had said that the heart attack had been his appointed time of death, but that Krishna had spared him due to the devotees' sincere prayers. His strength gradually recovering, Bhaktivedanta travelled back to San Francisco for a short visit, and then decided to leave for India via New York. He had established temples in New York and San Francisco, and

disciples had opened one in Montreal at his request; at the airport he instructed one to be opened in Los Angeles. Along with the Swami went one of his disciples, Kirtanānanda, and on August 1, 1967, Bhaktivedanta arrived back in Vrindaban no longer a lonely *sādhū*, but a guru with American disciples. Soon Kirtanānanda was given the *sannyāsa* initiation, becoming Kirtanānanda Swami, and India saw the first concrete evidence that the religion of Caitanya had truly spread to the West.

Bhaktivedanta returned to the United States in 1968 and resumed his normal schedule of translating, opening temples, and initiating disciples. He sent devotees to Boston; Santa Fe; New Vrindaban, West Virginia; Columbus, Ohio; London; and encouraged them to fan out over the globe, opening new temples everywhere, even if it was done by only one or two of them. He travelled to as many of these new centers as possible, and by the time he flew to London in September 1969, ISKCON counted 15 temples to its credit.

Bhaktivedanta's success continued to grow as the press gave him and his disciples increasing publicity, most of it positive. London was especially a challenge to the Swami, since his own guru had sent an emissary there in the 1930s to test the water for Krishna Consciousness. The extent of that success had been a few photographs taken with members of the royal family and one initiated disciple, Mrs. Elizabeth Bowtell, who was given the name Vinodavāṇī dāśī. The conclusion of the Gauḍiya Maṭha hierarchy in India had been that it was impossible to convert westerners to Vaishnavism; the prediction by Caitanya Mahāprabhu that the names of Krishna would be chanted "in every town and village" remained a conundrum; perhaps this only meant every town and village in India. So Bhaktivedanta was elated when six of his new disciples had early success in London.

Following the Swami's instruction, these devotees appeared on the streets to chant—the men shaven-headed in orange robes, the women in *saris*—and they immediately attracted attention. The newspapers carried headlines like "Krishna Chants Startle London" and "Happiness is Hare Krishna," and Bhaktivedanta pronounced that his neophyte followers had succeeded where his austere, scholarly godbrothers had failed. Indeed, he concluded, "every town and village" meant exactly that—every town and village in the world.

The Swami visited England from September to December in 1969, where he officially opened the temple there, then returned to the United States to visit the Boston center before settling in at Los Angeles for five months.

In L.A. the first temple that ISKCON actually owned was opened, and Bhaktivedanta made it a showplace and world headquarters for his movement. From there he travelled back to India for the first time in almost three years accompanied by an entourage of ten American *sannyāsīs*, with twenty more devotees joining him within the month. Bhaktivedanta had returned to India to initiate a new phase of his movement, with visions of monumental temple complexes in Bombay, Mayapur in Bengal (the birth-place of Caitanya), and Vrindaban. As Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami, his biographer and early disciple, explains, 'Śrīla Prabhupāda's plan had been to transplant the seedling of India's spirituality in the West and then return the healthy plant to its native soil, where the teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa had become confused....In reawakening India's own culture, Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted especially that there would be wonderful temples of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, temples for everyone's benefit" (1983: xvi). The ISKCCN group was a rage from the moment it touched down in Calcutta.

### ISKCON in Vrindaban

By this time, Bhaktivedanta had established temples in most major American cities, in Toronto, Montreal, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Tokyo, and even had several Russian disciples working undercover in Moscow. His goal, especially in the United States, was to distribute as many books as possible while maintaining the deity worship in temples for the advancement of his disciples. Now he was ready to implement the second, equally important thrust of his overall vision: to bring ISKCON back to India in force, amaze Indians by the fact that there were western devotees and thereby attract them back to their "original" religious consciousness, and build at all costs the temple complexes in Bengal, Bombay, and Vrindaban. Each of these temples had a particular purpose, but there can be little doubt that for Bhaktivedanta the Vrindaban project was of primary importance. However, Bhaktivedanta knew that not everyone in Vrindaban would automatically accept his disciples as legitimate. The caste *gosvāmīs* especially, he felt, feared ISKCON because it threatened their hereditary social preeminence, just as they had been threatened earlier by the Gauḍiṃya Maṭha. Thus he communicated an admonition to his followers that whenever they were in Vrindaban they had to be on their best behavior, emphasizing the proper etiquette for living there. He emphasized, "In the holy *dhāma*, if one of my disciples drinks from a jug incorrectly and he contaminates that jug, every-

one will notice it. Don't be criticized for uncleanliness, or I will be criticized. It is the duty of the disciple to follow these etiquette habits very austere. I am putting so much energy into this party in India because I want to train you how to live here" (Ibid. 30). The success of ISKCON's acceptance and integration in Vrindaban, Bhaktivedanta was keenly aware, depended on the devotees' proper presentation-of-self in public. If they were to make the controversial claim to *Brāhmaṇa* status, they had to act the part and perform it convincingly. Bhaktivedanta knew that his time was limited, that the continued success of ISKCON in India and its long-term acceptance as an international branch of Caitanya Vaishnavism depended on his disciples' positive evaluation by the Indian people as "pure Vaishnavas."

With much difficulty, and largely due to Bhaktivedanta's personal business acumen, the temple at Vrindaban was completed and opened in 1975, some two years before his death, as were the projects in Bombay and Bengal. Today, the Krishna-Balarāma temple is an integral part of Vrindaban's sacred complex, and interactions between foreign devotees and Indians occur daily in all spheres of social life.

While, on the one hand, ISKCON's acceptance has been due to the pre-determined niche provided by Caitanyaism's ideology and social code, on the other hand, it is clear that the acceptance of foreign devotees has also depended upon their implementation of an active behavioral strategy that makes it difficult for anyone to contest their legitimacy and purity. The interactive situations of everyday life in Vrindaban reveal just how important the dynamics of social reality have been for ISKCON there. Through these situations, the meanings of traditional symbols and categories have been subtly transformed. One example, and there are many, where such transformations result will demonstrate the kinds of processes taking place in Vrindaban, and at the same time comment upon the Caitanya tradition's vitality.

To initiate the construction of each of his Indian temples, Bhaktivedanta ceremoniously placed a golden image of Ānanta Śeṣa, the multi-headed serpent deity upon which Vishnu reclines, in a fifteen-foot pit situated in the center of the temple site. Everything went well during this ritual for the Vrindaban temple, and the residents there seemed supportive. Later that night, however, the pit was dug up and desecrated by someone throwing garbage and human excrement into it.

It was soon discovered that this incident did not reflect the general sentiments of the Vrindaban population, but rather the jealousy of a female

*sādhū* who lived adjacent to the property. A wealthy Vrindaban merchant had donated the temple site to ISKCON, and this woman was one of many individuals and groups in the town who also had wanted the property. She vowed that if she could not have it, no one else could. The police were notified and shown the deed, catching the perpetrators when they returned again later that same night, and no similar incident occurred after this. The woman responsible, Śyāma Mā, now denies that she was implicated in the incident in any way, and now explains:

I love you foreign bhaktas. You must be the *gopīs* returned to Vrindaban, the transcendental associates of my Lord Caitanya. This is a vicious rumor someone jealous to me started long ago. I have always supported, and was so glad that Balarāma mandir was going up there. I also have disciples in England, Australia, and when they see me they dance and sing in ecstasy. I am guru also, you see. There will be many opinions as there are many classes of men. The good people who have true vision will welcome. It is good fortune and we see foreign presence here the flowering of a lotus. Others can only see thorns. Don't be concerned with these fools.

After my discussion with Śyāma Mā, she offered a type of brittle sugarcandy as *prasād* (consecrated food), immediately calling for water from one of her female servants to wash her hands. With me were several ISKCON devotees, and they inquired if the water was for purification. She replied, "Yes, purification from sugar-dust. I take the dust of you pure Vaishnavas on my head for real purification." Perhaps Śyāma Mā was cynical in her praise of the foreign devotees, but this and other conversations with her indicate that her acceptance now is genuine. Common knowledge, as well as police records, however, confirm her implication in the desecration incident and her desire to see the foreigners gone. Her present attitude, then, reflects a transformation over the course of her living next to the ISKCON complex now for some ten years and having to interact daily with the devotees. In the beginning, she disavowed the possibility of foreigners becoming Vaishnavas, much less *Brāhmaṇas*; but now she awards the sacred thread to her own Western followers.

### Summary and Conclusion

The legitimate place of ISKCON in the Gauḍīya sampradāya of Caitanya Ma-



hāprabhu has been accepted by Indian adherents to that tradition, and the devout Hindu population in general has accepted ISKCON devotees as true Vaishnavas. This phenomenon can be understood by considering the life and teachings of Caitanya, and the historical antecedents of ISKCON that occurred in the revitalization of Caitanyaism by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and his son, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, the guru of Bhaktivedānta Swami, ISKCON's founder.

Caitanya taught that caste was an irrelevant criterion for achieving *mokṣa*, the ultimate aim of human existence, and through his actions he demonstrated the proper methods for man to cultivate his relationship with the Divine. After a long period of general malaise, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura rekindled interest and participation in Gauḍīya Vaishnavism, boldly stating that it was the true religion for the entire world, and should include everyone regardless of status or nationality. Bhaktisiddhānta institutionalized his father's ideas by founding the Gauḍīya Maṭha, a monastic organization that would lead the Indian laity into a new appreciation of Caitanyaism, inspiring his disciples to preach to everyone and spread the message worldwide. Bhaktivedānta took his guru's command seriously by travelling to America to found the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, an organization that would eventually make the name "Krishna" known practically everywhere. Swami Bhaktivedānta's disciples, therefore, link directly into the Caitanya tradition by virtue of their spiritual initiation and internalization of their guru's instructions.

The acceptance of western devotees has further been solidified by their behavior in India, which has practically exhibited to the people there that Bhaktivedānta was able to transform them into Vaishnavas. In Vrindaban, the sacred place of Krishna's childhood and adolescence, ISKCON's Krishna-Balarāma temple is now a popular part of that pilgrimage town's sacred complex, and the foreign Vaishnavas are a permanent component of its population. Today, they serve not only as priests in the ISKCON temple, but also perform other traditional religious roles, such as guru and family priest. Through the practical situations of everyday life in Vrindaban and the other places they reside, ISKCON devotees have transformed the meaning of symbols and categories so that they now are integrated into the Indian socio-cultural system.

Unlike other Indian swamis in the West, Bhaktivedānta refused to alter the teachings of his tradition to make them more palatable. He saw Caitanya Vaishnavism as "the eternal religion of humanity" that would be

accepted if presented exactly as the medieval Master had taught. For Bhaktivedanta, ISKCON was the inevitable meeting of East and West. India, he said, was like a lame man—full of knowledge and spiritual vision but without the physical strength to transmit it. The West was like a blind man—unable to see the truth, but full of strength and resources. Bhaktivedanta saw ISKCON as the meeting of “the blind man and the lame man,” whose cooperation would lead to a “golden age of Krishna Consciousness” for the entire world.

#### ENDNOTES

1. While “Hinduism” is commonly used to name the major religion of India, this term is neither an indigenous word nor is it descriptive. Indian religion is very diverse, and while there are some unifying characteristics, each religious sect must be considered individually in order to be understood. The term “Hindu” itself is the aspirated Persian gloss for people living along the Indus River.
2. Not being integrated into the Indian *varṇa*, or class system, foreigners are therefore “outcastes,” to use a western term. Just as Indians who do not fit into one of the four *varṇa* categories (Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, or Śudra), foreigners are considered ritually impure, the implication being that they cannot partake fully in the religious system.
3. The total ISKCON population in Vrindaban during my fieldwork period, 1982–1983, was 101. Thirty-eight members resided at the Krishna-Balarāma temple complex, the ISKCON qurukula (school) had forty-five resident students, and fifteen devotees lived elsewhere in the town.
4. Vrindaban is not only the town located on the banks of the Yamunā River in the southwestern corner of present-day Uttar Pradesh, which is the location of Krishna’s childhood and adolescence; it is also the celestial realm where Krishna eternally conducts His transcendental affairs. For the devout Krishna bhakta (devotee), the two are considered non-different.
5. Majumdar also lists four other biographical sources that these three probably drew from: *Kaṭacā* by Murāri Gupta; *Śrī-Caitanya-maṅgala* by Locan dās; *Śrī-Caitanya-maṅgala* by Jayananda; and Govinda-dās’s *Kaṭacā* (Majumdar 1969: 91-97).
6. Until the time of his *sannyāsa* initiation, Caitanya was known either by his given name of Viśvambar, or by Nimāi, a nickname indicating his birth under a neem tree. Hein translates the name Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya as “one who has consciousness of Kṛṣṇa” (1976: 15).
7. According to several informants this prophecy is contained in the *Bhāgavata Māhātmya* of the *Padma Purāṇa*. The primary text comments upon and extols the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* also is said to include the prophecy spoken by Caitanya that the name of Krishna would be chanted “in every town and village.”

8. Bhaktivedanta Swami dedicated his book *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* to Bhaktivinoda "Who initiated The Teachings of Lord Chaitanya in The Western World (McGill University, Canada) in 1896, The Year of My Birth" (Bhaktivedanta 1968: vii). According to one informant, it was in 1896 that Bhaktivinoda sent a copy of his English work, *Shri Chaitanya: His Life and Precepts*, to McGill.

9. The Ratha-yātrā, or cart festival, is held annually at Puri in Orissa. On this occasion, the Jagannātha images are removed from the temple there, placed upon elaborate chariots, and taken to the seashore in grand procession. The Jagannātha Ratha-yātrā at Puri is one of the largest religious festivals in India, and the ritual is repeated on a smaller scale at other places throughout the country. Ratha-yātrā was also one of the first festivals instituted by Bhaktivedanta in America, and today in all major cities of the world where ISKCON is established the devotees hold a similar celebration.

10. Caitanya's philosophy is called *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*, and takes the position that God and His creation are inconceivably and simultaneously the same and different. The emphasis is on duality, the fact that man ultimately is separate from God and perfection comes from establishing a relationship with Him. Dr. Misra, on the other hand, ascribed to the *advaita* philosophy of Śaṅkara, which insists that all creation is the same. For *advaitins* the ultimate goal is to "merge" with the godhead. For the Vaishnava, the goal is to maintain individuality and achieve a permanent, personal relationship with Krishna.

**Acknowledgement:** The chronology of events in the section "Bhaktivedanta and ISKCON" largely follows Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami's *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Volumes 1 and 2 (1980). The interested reader is referred to this detailed account of Swami Bhaktivedanta's life.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bhaktivedanta, A. C.

1968 *Teachings of Lord Chaitanya*. New York, ISKCON.

1975 *Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*, Volume Three. New York, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Brooks, Charles R.

1985 "A Unique Conjunction: The Incorporation of ISKCON in Vrindaban." In David G. Bromley and Larry D. Shinn, eds., *Krishna Consciousness in the West*. Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press.

Chakravarti, S. C.

1975 *Philosophical Foundations of Bengal Vaishnavism: A Critical Exposition*. Calcutta, Academic Publishers.

Das, R. K.

- 1978 *Legends of Jagannath Puri*. Bhadrak, Pragati udyog.
- De, S. K.  
1961 *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*. Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay.
- Dimock, Edward C.  
1966 *The Place of the Hidden Moon*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Gelberg, Steven J. ed.,  
1983 *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna*. New York, Grove Press.
- Goswami, Satsvarūpa dāsa  
1980a *A Lifetime in Preparation. Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Volume 1. Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.  
1980b *Planting the Seed. Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Volume 2. Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.  
1983 *Uniting Two Worlds. Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Volume 6. Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- Hein, Norvin  
1972 *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Hopkins, Thomas  
1966 "The Social Teachings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa." In Milton Singer, ed., *Krishna: Myths Rites and Attitudes*. Honolulu, East-West Center Press.
- Kapoor, O. B. L.  
1977 *The Philosophy and Religion of Śrī Caitanya*. New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Kennedy, Melville  
1925 *The Chaitanya Movement. A Study of the Vaishnavas of Bengal*. New York, Oxford university Press.
- Majumdar, Bimanbehari  
1969 *Krishna in History and Legend*. Calcutta, University of Calcutta Press.
- Vaudeville, Charlotte  
1976 "Braj, Lost and Found." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18: 195-230.
- Vidyarthi, L. P.  
1961 *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gaya*. Delhi, Concept Publishing Co.
- Yati, Bhakti Prajnan  
1978 *Renaissance of Gaudiya Vaishnava Movement*. Madras, Sri Gaudiya Math.

## INSIDER AND OUTSIDER PERCEPTIONS OF PRABHUPĀDA

Kim Knott

In August and September 1965, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami [later called Śrīla Prabhupāda] made the journey by sea from Calcutta to New York. As he neared his destination in the ship, the *Jaladuta*, the enormity of his intended task weighed on him. On September 13, he wrote in his diary, "Today I have disclosed my mind to my companion, Lord Śrī Krishna" (Goswami, 1980:3) On this occasion and five days later, Bhaktivedanta Swami called on Krishna for help in two devotional poems composed in his native Bengali. Reading the first of these intimate records of his prayerful preparation for what lay ahead, we learn something of how Bhaktivedanta Swami understood his own identity and mission.

...Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura...is unparalleled in his service to the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa. He is that great, saintly spiritual master who bestows intense devotion to Kṛṣṇa at different places throughout the world.

By his strong desire, the holy name of Lord Gaurāṅga will spread throughout all the countries of the Western world. In all the cities, towns and villages on the earth, from all the oceans, seas, rivers, and streams, everyone will chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa...

Although my Guru Mahārāja [Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī] ordered me to accomplish this mission, I am not worthy or fit to do it. I am very fallen and insignificant. Therefore, O Lord, now I am begging for Your mercy so that I may become worthy, for You are the wisest and most experienced of all... (Goswami, 1980: 277-8)

Bhaktivedanta Swami, by journeying to America, was attempting to fulfill

the wish of his guru, possible only by the grace of his dear Lord Krishna. Five days later, docked temporarily in Boston, Bhaktivedanta Swami revealed his anxieties still further upon encountering the country in which he was to fulfill his guru's instruction and sow his devotional message. Speaking directly to Krishna, he confessed,

...I do not know why you have brought me here. Now You can do whatever You like with me. But I guess You have some business here, otherwise why would You bring me to this terrible place?...

How will I make them understand this message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? I am very unfortunate, unqualified and most fallen. Therefore I am seeking Your benediction so that I can convince them, for I am powerless to do so on my own...

O Lord, I am just like a puppet in Your hands. So if You have brought me here to dance, then make me dance, make me dance, O Lord, make me dance as You like.

I have no devotion, nor do I have any knowledge, but I have strong faith in the holy name of Kṛṣṇa...(Goswami, 1980: 283-4)

Sharing with Lord Krishna his sense of hopelessness, Bhaktivedanta Swami then surrendered to him, praying for his intervention in the task ahead, offering only his own "strong faith" in exchange.

In addition to learning about Bhaktivedanta Swami's mission and his devotional relationship to Krishna and his guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, in these poems we glimpse some aspects of his self-perception. His was a Bengali *Vaiṣṇava* perspective, a view of himself as fallen, ignorant and lacking in devotion, as faithful to God and guru, but in need of mercy. In his later talks and letters, he refers occasionally to himself, his earlier life, his relationship to others and his vision of the spread of Krishna consciousness, but his viewpoint is wholly *Vaiṣṇava*. He humbly presents himself to the West in *paramparā*, in disciplic succession, continuing the teachings of Krishna, the sages and philosophers, Chaitanya (Lord Gaurāṅga), his followers, and the later Bhaktivinoda Thākura and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī.

The character, tone and mood of Bhaktivedanta Swami's devotional relationship to Krishna and his guru is mirrored in his own disciples' responses to him. This arises partly as a result of *Vaiṣṇava* etiquette concerning guru-disciple relationships, but also because of the great love, respect and

need for “Śrīla Prabhupāda,” as he soon became known, which quickly grew up among his close followers.<sup>1</sup> I will look at this more closely shortly and will examine how it differs from the perspectives on Prabhupāda of those who were not his disciples. In particular, I will consider scholarly responses which, though respectful and admiring, generally arise from conceptions of greatness, stature and achievement which differ from those identified with in Vaishnavism.

All perceptions of Prabhupāda are complex by virtue of his geographical, social and cultural location. Seen from any perspective, he achieved what no other Vaishnava teacher had accomplished, by successfully preaching devotion to Krishna worldwide.

Geographically nomadic after sixty-nine years living in northern India, the person of Prabhupāda, and his role and achievements have meaning in both Indian and Western contexts, but also cross-culturally, in terms of the late-modern process of globalization. As I will show, devotees, no less than scholars, have been able to make sense of this crucial aspect of Prabhupāda’s significance.

As a means of learning more about insider and outsider perceptions of Prabhupāda, I will consider three issues which have generated responses to his person, role and achievements: the guru, books and publishing, and the founding of ISKCON, an international missionary movement.

### **Prabhupāda and the role of the guru**

By the time Bhaktivedanta Swami first arrived in the United States he had initiated but one disciple. He had little experience of being a guru, but saw himself rather as “an English preacher,” following the instructions of his own guru.<sup>2</sup> An early newspaper account described him as an “ambassador of Bhakti-yoga...a slight brown man in faded orange drapes and wearing white bathing shoes...a messenger from India to the peoples of the West” (*The Butler Eagle* in Goswami, 1980:13). Like others who met him, the journalist was struck by Bhaktivedanta Swami’s appearance as well as his purpose. Howard Wheeler, later to become Hayagriva dāsa, recorded his first impression,

I first see him just after crossing the Bowery at Houston Street. As he passes before the iron-mesh fence of a playground, I distinctly glimpse the aura of saintliness. I watch him through the rushing traffic and stumbling derelicts.

He strolls almost jauntily down the sidewalk. He is an old man whom age has never touched. Aloof from the people and bustle about him, he walks proudly, independently, his hand in a cloth beadbag. He wears the saffron robes of a *sannyāsī*, and on his feet are quaint, pointed white shoes. (Hayagriva dasa, 1985:1)

As a young man who had spent time in India, Wheeler had correctly identified Bhaktivedanta Swami as a *sannyāsī*. Where he recognised saintliness, other interested young people saw serenity, dignity and refinement. In addition to his presence, they gained an impression of him through his activities, his quiet chanting, his energetic *kīrtana*, his lectures, his cooking and his conversation (Goswami, 1980, chapter 6). Some tried to make sense of what they encountered by linking the “Swami” with other images and ideas they had acquired about India and Indian religions, but, by his gradual instruction and example, they learnt to appreciate his distinctiveness, his difference from other Hindu gurus and Buddhist teachers.

It was when Bhaktivedanta Swami suggested that he initiate some of these early followers that Vaishnava teaching about the nature and role of the guru began to emerge. To his anxious students the Swami explained that the guru or spiritual master was God’s representative and accordingly worthy of worship and respect (Goswami, 1980:178-9). He repeatedly reiterated and clarified this in later talks and conversations. To hippies in San Francisco he stressed that, “a guru is not some pet, some fad...One must find the bona fide spiritual master and surrender to him. That is the injunction of *Bhagavad-gītā*” (Hayagriva dasa, 1985:150). His relationship with his own guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, and the devotion and worship that followed from it, also provided a means for devotees to learn about the meaning of guru, and about their own Swamiji’s humility. Michael Grant (Mukunda dāsa), one of the Swami’s earliest initiates, recalled him reflecting on his own status, “Actually, I am *not* a servant of God, I am *trying* to be a servant of God” (Prabhupāda, 1977:xiii).

Bhaktivedanta Swami’s role as guru was also revealed in an interview with an English journalist from *The Times* in 1969 in which the latter, reflecting all the conventional wisdom about gurus, enquired about what made a “genuine” guru. Did followers have to give money to the guru, to leave their jobs, or to live in the temple? How could they know the difference between “genuine” and “fake” gurus?

The genuine guru is God’s representative, and he speaks about God and nothing else. The genuine guru is he who has no interest in materi-



alistic life...He is absorbed in the Absolute Truth...He represents the Supreme Lord, just as a viceroy represents a king. The real guru will not manufacture anything. Everything he says is in accordance with the scriptures and the previous *ācāryas*. He will not give you a mantra and tell you that you will become God in six months. This is not a guru's business. A guru's business is to canvass everyone to become a devotee of God. (Prabhupāda, 1977:62).

Through such exchanges Bhaktivedanta Swami was able to teach his disciples and interested outsiders what it meant to be a guru in the Vaishnava tradition. He stressed the guru's relationship with God, the scriptural authority for the guru and the guru's duties, the link to previous *ācāryas* or teachers, the avoidance of manufacturing opinions, and the focus on bringing others to God.

Not only have these teachings been instrumental in informing disciples of the nature and role of the guru, but they have given them an interpretative framework for understanding the person and activities of their own spiritual master. This is evident, for example, in the morning lectures given by senior devotees in ISKCON and in the published writings of scholar-devotees such as Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami and Rāṁdra-svarūpa dāsa. Steven J. Gelberg (Śubhānanda dāsa) in "ISKCON after Prabhupāda," for example, wrote that Śrīla Prabhupāda "had tolerated no suggestion that he himself was any sort of divinity or avatār" (1985:8), thus stressing his spiritual master's teaching that as guru he was in no sense God. He continued, "the guru's presence is in his instructions, and in their execution is spiritually tangible" (8), reiterating a vital point made by Prabhupāda on many occasions but principally before his death in 1977: "I may stay or go, but in my books I will live forever" (Goswami, 1983(a):337). The guru lives in his eternal instructions (*vaṇī*), not in his transitory body (*vaṇuḥ*).<sup>3</sup>

In the years since his demise this idea has been critical in how Prabhupāda has been perceived by those exposed to his teachings. For those within ISKCON, in addition to the guidance of those gurus appointed post-1977 to initiate disciples, there has been the instruction of Prabhupāda in his books, talks and letters. To those devotees who have contested the authority of ISKCON's Governing Body Commission to appoint initiating gurus and who have consequently left the movement, Prabhupāda remains the only "living guru". In a journal, *Back to Prabhupāda*, founded by some of these disciples, the authors seek to establish his "unique, pre-eminent and unrivalled position as the saviour of mankind for the next ten thousand

years" (Prabhupadanugas, 1995:frontispiece) and to challenge what they see as the usurpation of his position by subsequent ISKCON gurus.<sup>4</sup>

The debate about guru succession and the authority of Prabhupāda, not only as founder-*ācārya* but as the continuing inspiration for Krishna consciousness, has been central in ISKCON for many years (Rochford; Shinn; Gelberg, 1985, 1988). In 1986, in a personal reflection on his own position as guru, Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami considered the relationship between the new gurus and Prabhupāda, noting particularly their error of imitation,

Prabhupāda was the only example of a guru and *ācārya* that we knew, and so we assumed that whoever was a bona fide guru would have to exactly imitate Prabhupāda in every way. Thus the prayers, titles, big *vyāsasanas*, lavish *guru-pūjās* and *Vyāsa-pūjās*, lavish living quarters, the personal comforts. (35)

We see in this that Prabhupāda's important role as an exemplar to be imitated went beyond that of Vaishnava etiquette and pious *sādhana* or devotional practice to that of perfect spiritual master worthy of worship.<sup>5</sup> It was only after a number of gurus broke the principles of the movement and were removed from office in 1986 that an open and critical debate began about the position of the gurus after Prabhupāda and their relationship to him. The authority and centrality of Prabhupāda was reasserted after 1986. All devotees were reminded of their eternal relationship with the founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON and the *guru-paramparā*. The powers of the remaining gurus were curtailed, and other suitably-qualified devotees were added to their number (Gelberg, 1988).<sup>6</sup> There was a recognition that Prabhupāda's pious devotion and spiritual qualification could not simply be acquired along with the role of guru. These characteristics had to be attained by discipline and devotional practice.

In an evaluation of the nature of the guru, Larry Shinn, a scholar of religions, utilised Max Weber's analysis of charisma in order to understand Prabhupāda and the issue of leadership in ISKCON. He noted that "Prabhupāda profited from two intertwined sources of authority" (1987: 40), the traditional authority of the disciplic lineage, *paramparā*, inherited from his own guru, and his own charismatic authority, derived from his spiritual attainment and presence, and that Prabhupāda's guru-successors had been able to adopt "his traditional role as initiating *acharya* but not...his status as charismatic leader" (49). Shinn offered an analysis based on sociological rather than spiritual (Vaishnava) authority in order to make sense of the role of guru in ISKCON and the unique qualities of Prabhupāda.

He offered a further observation on Prabhupāda as spiritual master by acknowledging that “to critics outside ISKCON, Prabhupāda may be viewed as being all too human to be considered ‘perfect’” (41). In doing this he made the interpretative shift from the devotional perspective of insiders (Śrīla Prabhupāda as “a perfect spiritual master” and “pure devotee”) to the varied but non-devotional perspectives of outsiders. In such views, while Prabhupāda might be admired for his achievements and spiritual discipline, or criticised, along with other gurus, for leading young people astray, he would be identified and presented as fully human. Neither scholarly nor anti-cult perceptions take the same starting point on the issue of Prabhupāda’s authority as devotees. He is examined for his human strengths and weaknesses. Shinn described him as “a sincerely religious old man” (42) who made “tactical and programmatic decisions he later would have to retract” (41). Thomas Hopkins, who first met him in 1967, in his Foreword to one of the volumes of Prabhupāda’s biography wrote of it as “a very human story with a very human Bhaktivedanta Swami at the center” (Goswami, 1980:xii). In anti-cult material, he and other gurus have been lumped together as “god-men,” as egotistical, cruel and exploitative of their followers (e.g. *Gods of the New Age*).

Yet, while accentuating Prabhupāda’s humanity, a number of scholars readily indicate his special qualities and achievements. Harvey Cox identifies him as “one in a thousand, maybe one in a million” (Gelberg, 1983:40-1); Hopkins notes that Prabhupāda’s is “an astonishing story” (Gelberg, 1983:127). Others have used words such as “stunning,” “remarkable” and “extraordinary” to describe his work in spreading Krishna consciousness in the decade before his death.

These ideas—of Prabhupāda’s humanity and uniqueness, his sameness and difference—derive from Western ideas (modern Christian and liberal secular) about the nature of individual persons, their participation in a common humanity but with their own unique value and character. As a religious leader, Prabhupāda has been evaluated by Westerners outside the movement from this perspective, though recognition has also been given—particularly by scholars—to the devotees’ alternative, spiritual interpretation of their guru’s activities and role.

### **Prabhupāda, books and publishing**

As Śrīla Prabhupāda reminded his devotees before his death, he would live

forever in his books. He would remain present for them as spiritual master by this means. What is more, the teachings of the *guru-paramparā* or lineage he represented would be available to all. As author of some sixty books (including his translations and commentaries on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* in thirty volumes and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* in seventeen volumes) published almost exclusively during the last ten years of his life, translated into many languages and distributed tirelessly by his devotees around the globe, Prabhupāda fulfilled his own guru's requests that he print books and preach Lord Caitanya's message around the world.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had instilled in his devotees an understanding of the importance of writing and publishing not only with regard to his works, but also their own initiatives. His early disciples felt they had been given *Back To Godhead* by Prabhupāda for their own writings, their own efforts at preaching (Goswami, 1980:247-50). Prabhupāda had first produced the English language magazine *Back To Godhead* in 1944 in response to his guru's advice. In 1966 he passed this responsibility on to his own disciples. "Don't be dull. Write something," he encouraged them (250). "You write your realisation—what you have realised about Kṛṣṇa...Whenever you find time, write. Writing or offering prayers, glories—this is one of the functions of a Vaiṣṇava." (Ravindra-svarūpa dāsa, 1984:xiii). Through hearing Prabhupāda's words, the devotees felt affirmed in using their creative and intellectual skills to write about Krishna Consciousness. They saw Prabhupāda inviting them, not to speculate, but to record their experiences and to present and represent the teachings of the Caitanya tradition. They learnt from him two key ideas, that the *paramparā* to which they belonged by virtue of their initiation was "the *sampradāya*," or spiritual tradition, "of the book" (xiii), and that books were the "big *mṛdāṅga*" or great drum (Hayagriva dasa, 1985: 195) with the potential to transmit Krishna Consciousness worldwide.<sup>7</sup>

A fellow Gauḍiṇya Vaiṣṇava, Shrivatsa Goswami, who as a young man had met Prabhupāda in India in 1972, affirmed the significance of book publishing and distribution in spreading the message of Caitanya in an interview with Steven Gelberg:

Making these Vaiṣṇava texts available is one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's greatest contributions. Apart from the masses, his books have also reached well into academic circles and have spurred academic interest in the Caitanya tradition...The significance of making these texts available is not merely academic or cultural; it is spiritual. *Jñāna*, knowledge, is

spread, proper doctrines are made known, people come closer to reality. (Gelberg, 1983:247)

With these words he looked inwards, to the values of Vaishnavism, and outwards, to the interests of a wider academic culture, to locate the importance of Prabhupāda's writing. From the Vaishnava perspective, his work spread the true teachings, enabling devotees to attain to consciousness and love of Krishna; from the perspective of the academy, it facilitated the study of an important tradition of Hinduism, previously little known and under-researched.

This second perspective has been noted by non-Hindu scholars, too. Thomas Hopkins, referring to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, commented that Prabhupāda "has really made these and other major texts of the Vaishnava tradition accessible in a way that they never were before, and so he's made the tradition itself accessible to the West" (Gelberg, 1983:140). Prabhupāda's strength in doing so, however, was not merely that he made important texts such as these and the *Bhagavad-gītā* comprehensible to westerners, but that he provided a traditional Vaishnava commentary upon them (140). The texts were delivered in a particular devotional framework, thus enabling a reader to see how the text could live for its devotional community and how it could be applied to particular problems. Hopkins thus confirmed that Prabhupāda's aim was not simply to serve scholars by providing new translations of key texts, but to make known a particular interpretation of those texts through his commentaries.

Hopkins and other western scholars of religion have given greatest consideration to Prabhupāda's approach in their analyses of his *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. Both Hopkins and Edward Dimock have reflected on the value of Prabhupāda's translation and commentary, neither doubting his scholarly skills but both indicating and appreciating his devotional standpoint. Hopkins commented that his is "the *Bhagavad-gītā* as seen through the perspective of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," in which Krishna the charioteer is understood to be "one and the same as" the Krishna of Vrindaban (Gelberg, 1983:144). Dimock, in his foreword to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, wrote that, "in this translation the Western reader has the unique opportunity of seeing how a Kṛṣṇa devotee interprets his own texts" (Prabhupāda, 1982:v). Both of these scholars recognized the utility for Western studies of religion of texts presented from within a living tradition.

Other scholars have experienced more difficulty in appreciating the value of a devotional standpoint, noting the negative aspects of such an

interpretative frame. Eric Sharpe identified Bhaktivedanta Swami's interpretation as single-minded and fundamentalist (1985:141-7). He saw *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* as a work of faith and Bhaktivedanta Swami as a man who loved the *Gītā*, but saw little virtue in these characteristics, concluding that, "*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* remains substantially an impression of what a particular corner of the Hindu world imagines that it is" (146). Sharpe clearly recognized Prabhupāda's particular standpoint, but did not identify the relationship between standpoints such as his and earlier *Bhagavad-gītā* commentaries. Instead, he judged Prabhupāda's scholarship according to Western values, noting that he had failed to mention ambiguities in the text and implying that he had misread the text in order to establish his own devotional perspective (144-5).

A. L. Herman also found Prabhupāda's translation and commentary problematic. He, too, identified its standpoint, and like Sharpe referred to this as Krishna fundamentalism. Like Sharpe, he compared Bhaktivedanta Swami's translation with other translations and found it wanting, noting "the curious and oftentimes embarrassing discrepancies" (1991:139), the contrary definitions and reinterpretations.

It is Robert Baird who has offered the most detailed exposition and analysis by a western, non-Hindu scholar of Bhaktivedanta Swami's translation and commentary. He located his account firmly in the very issue raised here, of conflicting interpretative frameworks. Succinctly, he wrote, "the gulf between Swami Bhaktivedanta's presentation and that of the scholarly exegete is unbridgable, for their purposes operate on different levels" (1986:200). Like Sharpe and Herman, as a scholar trained in western critical practices, he distinguished the *Gītā* itself from its interpretations, such as *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. He did this, however, by acknowledging the different interests and integrity of the academic and devotee, and by placing himself firmly in the camp of the former. From his standpoint, he then discussed Bhaktivedanta Swami's translation and commentary as a didactic work, a declaration of Krishna Consciousness by a guru in *paramparā*, a guru for whom the text was revealed truth. Baird, who as a western, non-Hindu scholar was unable to share this perspective and, in fact, had quite different objectives in understanding the *Bhagavad-gītā* and Bhaktivedanta Swami's interpretation of it, suggested that Bhaktivedanta Swami would have condemned his own (Baird's) approach as one of "speculative reasoning" (202), opinion rather than truth received through the correct disciplic tradition. Prabhupāda noted this himself in his Preface to *Bhagavad-gītā As*

*It Is.* Separating his intentions from those of “so-called scholars,” he explained that it is his purpose to present *Bhagavad-gītā* “without adulteration” (1982:viii).

Despite the distance between the standpoints of Prabhupāda and such scholars, both parties have an interest in this last point. Prabhupāda’s concern was to present the text “as it is” (viii); Baird noted that the historian’s concern was a desire “to understand everything that might be implied in the words of the text *without importing anything that is not actually there*” (201, my italics). Neither party, apparently, wished to see the text adulterated, but both had different ideas about the inherent meaning of the text. Although there was considerable mutual respect between Prabhupāda and those scholars of religion who were in contact with his work, the matter of scriptural interpretation seems to have been the one which brought their fundamental differences of perspective most clearly into view.

### Prabhupāda, ISKCON and mission

Prabhupāda inherited not only the call to print books but also the motivating energy of the Gauḍīya Maṭh to spread Lord Caitanya’s message to “every town and village” (Goswami, 1982:xix). For this purpose he had left India and gone west; for this purpose he had established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness [ISKCON] in 1966.<sup>8</sup> In this capacity, Prabhupāda was identified by his disciples not only as a guru following in the same lineage as Caitanya, but also as “founder-*ācārya*” of ISKCON. In relation to both, he was seen as successfully fulfilling Caitanya’s missionary prophecy of *saṅkīrtana*, praising Krishna in every town and village by his own travelling ministry and his inspiration to others to do likewise. The opening of temples worldwide, publishing of books in many languages, and touring of *saṅkīrtana* parties for book distribution and public chanting were all seen as instrumental in the realization of this prophecy.

The evidence of his success in fulfilling the prophecy has been vital for other Indians in formulating a view of Prabhupāda. Charles R. Brooks, in his account of the Hare Krishna movement in Vrindaban, made clear that those who knew Bhaktivedanta Swami from his days as a resident there before his journey westwards little suspected that he would achieve the goals he had set himself. Seen variously as “a beggar,” “a bother,” “naive but determined” (1989:75-6), Bhaktivedanta Swami was not taken seriously by some of his neighbours. His mission to America was seen as “a child’s fanta-



sy—very innocent but improbable” (75). Not surprising then that later, in 1982-3, Brooks should find some of Prabhupāda’s old neighbours claiming greater friendship with Prabhupāda or more awareness of his spiritual gifts than they had had in reality at the time of his residence among them. With more honesty, one admitted,

We were thinking: Why this old man has such fancy? He has no disciples. He is old and lives as Vrindaban sadhu, so he has reached life’s goal. Why he was bothering with such fancy dreams to only disturb his mind? Of course now we say, “Oh yes, Prabhupād is my good friend for so many years. I encouraged his mission. I knew he was mahatma (great soul) and so forth.” We were all fools. We could not see this old man was some future *jagadguru* (world teacher)! (76)

Prabhupāda’s return to Vrindaban with his western disciples and news of the global spread of ISKCON led to a new respect and a recognition that Krishna had indeed been behind his success.

One western scholar who knew Bhaktivedanta Swami from the time of his own stay in Vrindaban in 1962 was Klaus Klostermaier. In an article reflecting on the impact of the Caitanya movement in America, he reminisced,

Swami Bhaktivedanta, the later founder of the Hare-Krishna movement, was a frequent guest at our Institute. As Swami Bon’s *guru-bhai*, he used to visit us regularly and I had many conversations with him. Years later, when I first heard of the Hare-Krishna movement, I was surprised to find my old acquaintance of Vrindaban days to be the founder and guru of this rapidly expanding movement. (1980:95)

Although initially bemused by the fact that young modern, progressive Americans were following the Swami and his Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teachings, he came to realize the potential of the idea of God-consciousness to capture the western imagination.

Klostermaier and other commentators have noted that an earlier attempt by a Gauḍīya missionary to establish Caitanya’s message in the West had failed. Bon Mahārāj, like Bhaktivedanta Swami after him, had tried to fulfill the desire of his guru to extend *saṅkīrtana* beyond the shores of India. He had returned from England with only one serious disciple to his credit.

Thomas Hopkins has been keen to stress that the success of ISKCON worldwide arose not only from Prabhupāda’s own efforts, but from “the revitalized Caitanyaite tradition that stemmed from Kedarnath Dutt’s efforts



in the nineteenth century" (1989:49). Prabhupāda had inherited the impulse to preach from his own guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, the son of Kedarnath Dutt, or Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, as he became known. As middle class Bengalis, both father and son were influenced by the British administration in Calcutta, its English educational system, and its commitment to the medium of printing for the dissemination of ideas. Both contributed to a repositioning of Caitanya's prophecy in a modern context, and it was this that led Prabhupāda to success in the West. The comparison of Prabhupāda with Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's less successful disciples, however, lead Hopkins to acknowledge "his tremendous personal spirituality and holiness, and his incredible determination" (Gelberg, 1985:127), qualities which enabled him to succeed where others had failed.<sup>9</sup>

Shrivatsa Goswami added to these qualities those of boldness and courage in his appreciation of Prabhupāda's mission. As a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava himself, he admitted that,

When I reflect on Śrīla Prabhupāda's achievement, I become a sort of Hindu chauvinist. I am not ashamed of it. The process initiated, rather imperfectly, by Rāmakrishna, Vivekānanda, and others was brought to its logical and ultimate end by spreading and making "Rāma" and "Krishna" household words throughout the world. That is the greatest achievement...What the Muslims could do only by the tremendous sword, and the Christians could do only with great financial resources and state power, has been done by one solitary man, without any ill effects. (241-2)

What was most striking, according to Shrivatsa Goswami, was the way in which this had been achieved in a materialistic, thus hostile, culture.

### **Bridging the Cultural Gap**

Both Thomas Hopkins and Shrivatsa Goswami have located Prabhupāda's achievement firmly within its modern context by relating it to the self-conscious revitalization of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism in British Bengal and the globalizing strategy of other well-known neo-Hindu figures. As both point out, Prabhupāda has been noted for transplanting a culturally specific form of Hinduism, though one stressing teachings with potentially universal appeal. This in itself is surprising.

Bhaktivedanta Swami has managed, successfully, to bridge an enormous

cultural gap and to give practical application to teachings that were originally designed for people in a very different cultural setting. That's not easy to do, by any means. (Hopkins in Gelberg, 142)

Prabhupāda's ability to bridge this cultural gap has been viewed in varying ways by commentators. Many have seen this as an extraordinary achievement, and have stressed Prabhupāda's skill as a teacher and his ability to catch the interest of a generation; others have chosen to note his unwillingness to compromise, seeing this as a weakness in the context of modernity. Scholars themselves have disagreed on whether or not Prabhupāda understood the scale and nature of his global preaching mission, some seeing him as naive, others as wise and commanding, though generally all have accepted the success of his transmission of Vaishnavism in novel, social and cultural milieux.

Devotees have also been interested in making sense of this aspect of Prabhupāda's achievement. Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami has seen this as an attempt to unite two different worlds in Krishna Consciousness, bringing benefit to both, bringing together "the East's Kṛṣṇa conscious culture with the West's prosperity and technological advancement" (1983(a):xvi), thus reiterating the cultural exchange proposed by Vivekānanda at the end of the nineteenth century. Michael Grant (Mukunda dāsa) has focussed on Prabhupāda as an embodiment of Indian Vaishnava culture in the West (Prabhupāda, 1977:xiii). But Ravindra-svarūpa has noted Prabhupāda's skillful use of "innovation" in negotiating a successful form of Vaishnava practice and organisation for the West. With reference to chanting, *ashrama* (stages of life), worship and women, he has shown the adjustments that Prabhupāda made to enable his mission to take hold and become popular in a very different religious and social context (1989:73). Prabhupāda had to tread a fine line between intransigence and compromise in transplanting Krishna Consciousness. Remaining true to the teachings of the *guru-paramparā* was imperative, while at the same time being receptive to differences in context. Ravindra-svarūpa has presented a founder-*ācārya* who was sensitive to these matters, aware of the need to bridge a cultural divide between India and her religious traditions, and "the alien Manhattan streets" (1984:48), but without adulterating or reinterpreting his inheritance.

### Conclusion: Perspectives from Inside and Outside

That those inside and outside ISKCON have drawn broadly different con-

clusions on the nature and significance of the person of Prabhupāda and his activities is not in itself surprising. Generally, for devotees inside the movement, Vaishnava theology and etiquette provide the lens through which to view the “spiritual master,” “pure devotee” and “founder-*ācārya*”; for those depicted in this examination as outside the movement, the secular liberal lens stresses Prabhupāda’s humanity at the expense of his spiritual significance. Furthermore, scholarly outsiders, using modern, textual-critical strategies read Prabhupāda’s translations and commentaries not as *śāstra*, scripture, presented unadulterated to a new audience by a bona fide guru, but as a modern, devotional interpretation of the *Bhagavad-gītā* in the *Mahābhārata*. Even Prabhupāda’s success in transplanting Krishna consciousness and expanding ISKCON worldwide has a different meaning to insiders and outsiders. For the former, it represents the fulfillment of prophecy; for the latter, the highly successful and opportunistic engagement of a particular religious tradition with the modern process of globalization.

Such insider and outsider standpoints have their own logic and integrity, their own objectives, tenets and values (Rosen, 1992; Knott, 1993). For Baird, with regard to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* at least, the gap between the devotional insider and the scholarly outsider views is “unbridgable,” one open to esoteric interpretation and the other closed to its possibility (1985: 201).

Identifying such differences of view can be helpful in understanding where a key religious figure, like Prabhupāda, or a text, symbol or tradition, is positioned in both religious discourse and discourse about religion. A case study in which this complementarity is exemplified is the book edited by the devotee-scholar Steven J. Rosen (Satyarāja dāsa) in which he discusses aspects of Gauḍīya Vaishnavism with historians, sociologists and textual critics of religion. As he affirms, however, we should beware of overstating the distinction between different perspectives. It is clear that there is sufficient diversity in the views of both insiders and outsiders—as witnessed above by scholars on Prabhupāda on the *Gītā* and devotees on Prabhupāda as cultural bridge—to challenge any temptation we might have simply to polarize these perspectives into two opposing camps. As Katherine Young has pointed out,

...our terminology of “insider” and “outsider” is out of date. This is true because our “insiders” are also “outsiders.” In addition to

their experience as devotees, their understanding draws from historical and philosophical studies, and they use the language of the modern academic disciplines. Also the "outsiders" are, in a way, "insiders" in that they have studied traditional Vaishnava religion with phenomenological appreciation of this form of spirituality and perhaps have discovered analogies with their own religious experience. Thus, today, the comparative perspective of "insider" and "outsider" has a new complexity... (1985:29)

This "new complexity" is visible in the selected perceptions of Prabhupāda presented above. In addition to devotional views among insiders, there are also critical, theological insights provided by "devotee-scholars." And among the perspectives of outsiders there are those which favor empathy and those that depend on critical distance. This "new complexity" is, on the one hand, spurred on by the nature of the study of religion as a scholarly practice and, on the other, by the need and interest of contemporary religious movements like ISKCON to negotiate the secularizing and globalising processes of modernity.

Although Prabhupāda was aware of such processes and had his own ways of confronting them, there can be little doubt about his own perspective on the meaning of his life and work: He was the most fallen creature and the founder-*ācārya*, the servant of the servant and the guru worthy of worship, the disciple of his guru and the guru of his disciples. His was the view of a Gauḍiṣya Vaishnava in all its traditional complexity.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have used the various names for the founder of ISKCON, generally using "Prabhupāda," though preferring "Bhaktivedanta Swami" for specific reference to his early years and for references by scholarly commentators, and "Śrīla Prabhupāda" for devotional references by disciples.

<sup>2</sup> These instructions were that Bhaktivedanta Swami should preach Lord Caitanya's message around the world (1922), that he should print books (1935) and that he could and should become an able preacher (1936) (Goswami, 1983(b), Introduction).

<sup>3</sup> See also Goswami (1981:52) in a letter from Śrīla Prabhupāda to his disciples in New York in January 1967, "I understand you are feeling my absence... Physical presence is immaterial; presence of the transcendental sound received from the

spiritual master should be guidance through life."

<sup>4</sup> See also *Our Living Guru* (Prabhupadanugas, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> The practice of offering worship to a guru is an important part of Vaishnava religious practice and is witnessed in the daily *guru-pūjā* to Prabhupāda in ISKCON temples and the annual *vyāsa-pūjā* celebration (Gelberg, 1989). The question that arose in 1986 was whether the post-Prabhupāda gurus were worthy of worship on the grounds of their own spiritual attainment.

<sup>6</sup> In 1996 there were some eighty men holding office as *diksha* or initiating gurus (telephone conversation, ISKCON's European Communications Director, Saunaka ṛṣi dāsa).

<sup>7</sup> For details of the spiritual succession (the *Brahmā sampradāya*) see Prabhupāda, 1982, p.29.

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of ISKCON see Goswami (1980:132-2) and for its basic beliefs see the *Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Handbook* quoted in Shinn (1987:80-1).

<sup>9</sup> Klostermaier (1980), Cox (Gelberg, 1985) and no doubt Hopkins himself would have seen part of Prabhupāda's success as attributable to the context of American religion and society in general and its youth culture in particular.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baird, Robert D., 1986, "Swami Bhaktivedanta and the Bhagavadgītā 'As It Is,'" in Robert N. Minor, *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavadgītā*, New York, SUNY, pp.200-21.
- Bromley, David and Larry D. Shinn, eds, 1989, *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, Lewisburg, Associated University Presses.
- Brooks, Charles R., 1989, *The Hare Krishnas in India*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Gelberg, Steven J. (Subhananda dasa), ed., 1983, *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna: Five Distinguished Scholars on the Krishna Movement in the West*, New York, Grove Press.
- 1985, "ISKCON after Prabhupāda," *ISKCON Review*, 1:1, p.7-14.
- 1988, "The fading of utopia: ISKCON in transition," *The Bulletin of the John Ryland's University Library of Manchester*.
- 1989, "Exploring an alternative reality: Spiritual life in ISKCON," in David Bromley and Larry D. Shinn, eds, *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, pp.135-62. *Gods of the New Age*, Rivershield Film Production.
- Goswami, Satsvarupa dasa, *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, 6 vols, Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- 1980, *Planting the Seed: New York City, 1965-6* (vol 2).
- 1981, *Only He Could Lead Them: San Francisco/India, 1967* (vol 3).
- 1982, *In Every Town and Village: Around the World, 1968-71* (vol 4).

- 1983(a), *Uniting Two Worlds: Around the World/Return to Vrndavana*, 1975-7 (vol 6).
- 1983(b), *Prabhupāda: He Built a House In Which the Whole World Can Live*, Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- 1986, *Guru Reform Notebook*, Washington DC, Gita-nagari Press.
- Hayagriva dasa, 1985, *The Hare Krishna Explosion: The Birth of Krishna Consciousness in America, 1966-9*, Palace Press.
- Herman, A. L. 1991, *A Brief Introduction to Hinduism: Religion, Philosophy and Ways of Liberation*, Boulder, Westview Press.
- Hopkins, Thomas, 1989, "The social and religious background for transmission of Gauḍiṇya Vaiṣṇavism to the West," in David Bromley and Larry D. Shinn, eds, *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, pp.35-54.
- Klostermaier, Klaus, 1980, "Will India's Past be America's Future? Reflections on the Chaitanya Movement and its potential," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 15:1-2, pp.94-103.
- Knott, Kim, 1993, "Problems in the interpretation of Vedic literature: The perennial battle between the scholar and the devotee," *ISKCON Communications Journal*, 2, pp.51-6.
- Prabhupāda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1977, *The Science of Self-Realization*, Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- 1982, *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- Prabhupadanugas, 1993, *Our Living Guru*.
- 1995, *Back to Prabhupāda*, 1.
- Ravindra-svarūpa dāsa, 1984, *Encounter with the Lord of the Universe: Collected Essays 1978-83*, Washington D. C., Gita-nagari Press.
- 1989, "Patterns in ISKCON's historical self-perception," in David Bromley and Larry D. Shinn, eds., *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, pp.55-75.
- Rochford, E. Burke, 1985, *Hare Krishna in America*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.
- Rosen, Steven J. ed., 1992, *Vaiṣṇavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauḍiṇya Tradition*, New York, Folk Books.
- Sharpe, Eric J., 1985, *The Universal Gītā: Western Images of the Bhagavad-gītā*, London, Duckworth.
- Shinn, Larry D., 1987, *The Dark Lord: Cult Images and the Hare Krishnas in America*, Philadelphia, The Westview Press.
- Young, Katherine, 1985, "Response to papers", *ISKCON Review*, 1:1, pp.29-33.

## 1965: IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR\*

Bruce N. Scharf (Brahmānanda Dāsa)  
and Steven J. Rosen (Satyarāja Dāsa)

### Introduction

This paper will explore the idea that the year 1965 served as a host, if you will, for three consequential events—emendations to the then-existing immigration laws, a papal decree, and the phenomenon known as the counterculture—and that these events helped facilitate the arrival of an Eastern religious/philosophical system of thought onto Western shores.<sup>1</sup> That system, known as Vaiṣṇavism (an ancient form of monotheism that refers to God as Viṣṇu, or Krishna), was introduced to the West in 1965 by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (later given the honorific “Śrīla Prabhupāda” by his disciples), a monk in the long-standing Brahmā-Madhva-Gauḍīya lineage.

Sociologists and historians of religion have posited that this particular year was critically significant, that had Prabhupāda made his journey either a year earlier or later, he would not have achieved the same degree of success. Needless to say, adherents to the faith take a different tack, seeing the successful unfolding of Prabhupāda’s mission as divine dispensation—the year not being particularly significant. Nonetheless, believers would have to admit that Prabhupāda did come to western shores at a time most appropriate for his work, a time when people would be ready to hear his message.

This paper, therefore, focuses on the concatenation of the three events that occurred in 1965, rendering Prabhupāda’s appearance in the western

---

\* Special thanks to Barbara Berasi (Vṛndā-devī-dāsi) for her assistance in editing this essay.

world exceedingly timely. We begin with a brief analysis of Prabhupāda's place in the Gauḍīya tradition and the predictions from within that very tradition which his mission appeared to fulfill. We then proceed with an exploration of the three events mentioned above, inviting both scholars and devotees to critically examine the circumstances and evaluate for themselves if there is not some "divine arrangement" at play here.

### The Mission

On August 13, 1965, only a few days before the advent celebration of Lord Śrī Krishna, on a disheveled dockside in Calcutta, an elderly Indian monk—then known as A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami—carrying only a small suitcase, an umbrella, and a bag of dry cereal, climbed up a steep gangway onto an old cargo steamship, aptly named the *Jaladuta* ("the Messenger from the Water"). After a rough voyage of thirty-five days (during which he suffered two heart attacks), the ship berthed in Boston at Commonwealth Pier on September 17. The time, metaphorically appropriate, was sunrise, 5:30 A.M., to be exact.

The next day, the "Messenger from the Water" continued to New York, where the solitary monk disembarked onto a rugged Brooklyn pier and into the land of America. Although the monk's personal possessions were few and simple, his personal qualities of knowledge, renunciation, and devotion were immeasurable. He would share these spiritual riches with everyone he would meet, at first from a bleak Bowery loft, then while sitting on an oriental rug under a tree in a New York park, and finally from an unassuming shop located in the city's bohemian Lower East Side. Here he would make an impact, not for saavy marketing of "Hindu hocus-pocus" as the "anticult" critics liked to claim, but rather for authentically transmitting an age-old religious tradition, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, which was inaugurated by the Bengali ecstatic, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486-1533). A pivotal figure in the lineage represented by Prabhupāda, Śrī Caitanya revived the spiritual sentiments of Bengal in medieval times, even as Martin Luther (1483-1546) was instigating the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Caitanya's wish was that his followers spread the doctrine throughout India and to every town and village of the world. Not only did this fail to happen in Caitanya's time, but the tradition, by Prabhupāda's time, had become moribund in its subcontinental milieu.

Aware of the increasing tendency on the part of his fellow countrymen to adopt western ideas and practices, Prabhupāda's intention in transplanting



the tradition, besides benefitting its western recipients, was to reinvigorate its original proponents in India. Indeed, some have likened Prabhupāda's accomplishment to the first transplantation of a human heart by the South African surgeon, Dr. Christian Barnard, in 1967. Just as that physician replaced an old, dysfunctional heart with a new and robust one in order to provide rejuvenated life, Śrīla Prabhupāda revived an endangered religious tradition by transferring it to an alien culture. The "heart" of this Indian religion (*bhakti*), which had all but stopped beating, was given new life when Prabhupāda performed his transplant. The transplant a success, the tradition thrived in its new home (and in its native land once again) and, ironically, became widely known in the West as a "new" religious movement. Although the "heart" analogy has certain limitations, it is clear that Prabhupāda's transplantation was quite successful.

In fact, his success was a unique achievement amongst all the respected saints in the great succession of Vaiṣṇava sages (*ācāryas*). It is for this reason that Prabhupāda became widely known as the West's first "ambassador of *bhakti*" and as the "Founder-*Ācārya*" of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

### A Mission Prophesied

Lending credence to the providential nature of Prabhupāda's mission are a number of scriptural passages foretelling his coming, albeit obliquely, as well as prescient statements by sages in the tradition preceding Prabhupāda.

To begin, Caitanya Mahāprabhu is quoted as saying "My name—the name of Krishna—will spread to every town and village of the world."<sup>2</sup> This prophecy, from the sixteenth century, did not manifest in practical form until after Prabhupāda's arrival on western shores.

Prior to the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* reference mentioned above, the *Padma Purāṇa* stated that *bhakti*, or loving devotion to the Lord, would be carried by someone from South India to Vṛndāvana, and then to "other lands." There are elaborate commentaries on this phenomenon, but it is clear that Prabhupāda first went to South India, then Vṛndāvana, and from there he came West with his treasure of devotion to Krishna. A clear fulfillment of the *Purāṇa*'s prophecy.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there is the more often cited prediction of Bhaktivinoda Thākura (1838-1914), a saint in the tradition, in which he writes about a universal religion centered on the chanting of the holy name of Krishna. While he doesn't mention Prabhupāda directly, his description of people from va-

rious countries joining together in *kīrtana* did not take place until Prabhu-pāda came West:

In the world now, there are so many religious communities, and in their purest, mature form they are the religion of singing the praises of the Lord. At the present time there is a great spiritual quest going on in the world, and it seems that the one unalloyed religion which is the essence of all religions will soon emerge. What is that religion? It is plain to see that in western countries and in Asia, religions are engaged in conflicts. There is no doubt that these religions will not be able to endure. Therefore, many of the established religions which harbor prejudiced, conflicting beliefs have become fragmented. When all of these contradictory dogmas are removed, it is then and there that all religions will be united. Let us consider the specifications the Eternal Religion would have: (1) God is one and is the all-knowing source of knowledge. He is devoid of all limitations and is the reservoir of all good qualities. (2) All living entities are His infinitesimal parts and parcels of consciousness, and the eternal function of all living entities is to serve the Supreme Lord. (3) To sing the glorious qualities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and to establish the brotherhood of all men as pure religion.

Gradually the established religions will then be removed of all specific contradictions, and the secular or "party spirit" will not remain. Then all castes, all creeds, and men of all countries will be united in coexistent brotherhood under the Supreme Personality of Godhead, united by *nāma-saṅkīrtana*, the congregational chanting of the Lord's holy name.

Very soon the unparalleled path of Hari-*nāma-saṅkīrtana* will be propagated all over the world. Already we are seeing the symptoms. Already many Christians have tasted the nectar of divine love of the holy name and are dancing with *kartals* [hand-cymbals] and *mṛdaṅgas* [drums]. Educated Christians are ordering these instruments and shipping them to England. By the superexcellence of Lord Krishna's holy name and the grace of pure devotees, our consciousness gets purified...Oh, for that day when the fortunate English, French, Russian, German and American people will take up banners, *mṛdaṅgas* and *kartals* and raise kīrtana through their streets and towns. When will that day come? Oh, for that day when the fair-skinned men from their side will raise up the chanting of Jai Sachinandana, Jai Sachinandana ki jai, and join with the Bengali devotees.<sup>4</sup>

Bhaktivinoda states it even more directly: "Soon a personality will appear who will preach the holy name of Hari all over the world."<sup>5</sup>

### It Was a Very Good Year

We will now proceed to the central theme of our thesis, namely, that Prabhupāda's historic journey from the East was precipitated by a series of legal, ecclesiastic, and sociological events in the Western world that would inadvertently make this a fertile ground for the reception of his message. Devotees generally relegate the significance of these events to the domain of "mundane considerations," and necessarily afford them a secondary position when compared to the more overtly spiritual reasons for Prabhupāda's success, i.e., his lifetime of preparation (as delineated in Satsvarūpa Dāsa Goswāmī's *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*); his exceptional personal character; his initiation in disciplic succession; his scholarship and pure devotion. Possessing these qualities gave Prabhupāda access to divine beneficence, say his followers, which manifested, in this instance, in the three categories of "mundane" phenomena described below.

#### A. The Legal Dimension: Immigration

When the Jaladuta landed in Boston, the U.S. Immigration officials boarded it and processed Śrīla Prabhupāda's entry as an American visitor. Asked how long he intended to stay, he replied "two months." His passport was duly stamped and the date of intended exit was entered. Although Prabhupāda was hardly aware of it, he had entered the U.S. while prohibitive immigration laws were in effect. These laws reflected a protracted period of racial and religious hostility and suppression. J. Gordon Melton, the founder and Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion, in a paper published in *Krishna Consciousness in the West* has uncovered the following facts.<sup>6</sup>

The turn of this century saw a sudden increase in Indian immigrant workers, in particular the conspicuously turbaned Sikhs from the Punjab, who emigrated to America's Northwest coast, because they were attracted by the lucrative labor jobs in the expanding timber industry. The result was an ever-growing resentment among the local American population, who felt jobs were being lost to the new arrivals who were willing to work longer hours for lower wages. The year 1907 saw in half a dozen cities anti-Indian riots and violence. During World War I, there emerged an entrenched prejudice against Chinese immigrants. War-time politics, the Chinese communal habit of aloofness from other Americans, and the Chinese financial success, made them objects of suspicion and resentment. In general, America's reaction to the war was a strong isolationism and a refusal to accept

outside ideas and cultures. An incipient racialism for preserving America as an Anglo-Saxon bastion proliferated. This bigotry was a factor of the fundamentalism of the rural Protestants, who took the commanding position of America's social mix. Congress responded, over the veto of President Woodrow Wilson, with the passage of the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1917. This law created the Asian Barred Zone, which included India, and from which no immigrants were permitted. Indians who had previously resettled in America and who tried to gain citizenship were denied by a Supreme Court ruling in 1923, which conceded that Indians were "caucasians" (emphasis added) but could not be considered "white."

The Immigration Act of 1924 modified the prohibition by creating a quota system, which was fixed at one-sixth of one percent of the total number of immigrants from each particular country living in America in 1920. This meant that the total number of Indians allowed to immigrate was 100 per year. These laws prevailed for 45 years until they were suddenly amended by an act that abolished the quotas. This major reform of the immigration laws, which was first proposed by President John F. Kennedy, was ultimately signed by President Lyndon Johnson in a dramatic ceremony in New York at the foot of the Statue of Liberty on October 3, 1965—only three weeks after Śrīla Prabhupāda's arrival.

Professor Melton observes that, "Between 1871 and 1965, only 16,013 Indians had been admitted to the United States. Between 1965 and 1975, more than 96,000 were admitted, and the 1980 Census reported 387,223 Indians in the United States.... This change in the immigration also allowed a number of Hindu teachers to come to the United States and establish new groups consisting predominantly of new converts from among the general population.... A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, having come to America on a tourist visa just before the immigration laws were changed, was able to stay in America because of the change."<sup>7</sup>

However, there were further immigration difficulties for Śrīla Prabhupāda. He had initially intended to stay for only two months. However, after determining that there was an opportunity to spread the philosophy of Krishna consciousness in America (and at the fervent urging of his new students), Śrīla Prabhupāda applied for permanent residence, after having obtained several extensions to his tourist visa. The application for permanent residence was denied with the following reply: "You came originally as a visitor and later applied for residence, which means that you did not truly enter as a visitor."

Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers sought legal help. The well-known though non-conformist poet, Allen Ginsberg, who personally knew Śrīla Prabhupāda, was prevailed upon for advice and assistance. A lawyer specializing in immigration was hired. After a considerable number of visits, telephone calls, and meetings for which he naturally charged fees, the lawyer suggested he could lobby a Congressman to propose a resolution on the floor of the United States House of Representatives for specific residence for Śrīla Prabhupāda by name. The late Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York was mentioned as an appropriate lawmaker to do this—but it would all cost money, something of which Śrīla Prabhupāda's early disciples, who were all inexperienced young men and women, had very little. Consequently, nothing was being done to solve the problem.

Prabhupāda then obligingly complied with the order of the immigration department to leave the country. He went to Montreal, Canada, where the first preaching center outside of America, and the third after New York and San Francisco had recently been established, under his direction. This center was set up with the initial effort of one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's earliest disciples who was a French-Canadian. Being resigned to the fact that he might not be able to obtain permanent residency in the U.S., Śrīla Prabhupāda planned to stay in Montreal until the new Canadian center was firmly on its feet; after that, he would go to London to establish his movement abroad. Śrīla Prabhupāda reasoned that by opening centers in these four important cities, Montreal, New York, San Francisco and London, his mission would have been accomplished and he would then be able to return to India.

As fate would have it, Śrīla Prabhupāda soon applied for residency in Canada. Obtaining residential status there afforded Prabhupāda the opportunity to freely travel to the United States. This being the case, Śrīla Prabhupāda planned to make Montreal his headquarters. He next applied to the American consulate in Canada for residential status in the United States, and this was finally granted in October of the same year. Thus perseverant, Prabhupāda had strategically accomplished this first step enabling him to stay in the country. He therefore became one of the first test cases to be granted permanent residency under the new immigration laws, which came into effect at much the same time as did his arrival in America. Thereafter, many Indians emigrated to the States in a similar manner.

### **B. The Religious Dimension: A Papal Edict**

After disembarking from the *Jaladuta*, Śrīla Prabhupāda traveled to Butler,

Pennsylvania, where, on the recommendation by a friend in India, he became the houseguest of an Indo-American family. Prabhupāda found himself in a typical small town in provincial America. He delivered a few lectures at a local YMCA, to assorted religious groups, curious college classes, and with his hosts he had friendly chats, but he knew this was not the purpose for which he had come to America, risking his life in the process. After a few weeks, Śrīla Prabhupāda began to plan to go to New York, a place his small-town friends had politely suggested might provide a better audience for his teachings. At this time Pope Paul VI made a momentous visit to New York. America, still reverberating from the assassination of John F. Kennedy two years before, was injudiciously escalating its war with North Vietnam, and the Pope came to deliver a peace address to a special session of the U.N. General Assembly. Arriving on October 4, 1965 (the day after President Johnson signed the immigration law) the Pope made a whirlwind visit of only fifteen hours, creating quite a stir.

It was the first visit by a pope to the Western Hemisphere. A twenty-mile motorcade from the airport passed through New York streets lined with people totaling in the millions. The Pontiff was protected by a special police force of 18,000 officers, the largest force ever, larger even than the one for Khrushchev, who had visited New York some years earlier. The Pope's address at the United Nations, being the first papal appearance before a secular political body in centuries, was directed primarily to America; which had by then bombed North Vietnam with three times the entire tonnage of bombs dropped in World War II in all of Europe, Asia, and Africa, yet which failed to destroy Vietnam's military or economic infrastructure. This resulted in the U.S. increasing its forces to 200,000.<sup>8</sup> The Pope's ardently delivered plea for peace, broadcast live by television and radio to 20 nations, reached hundreds of millions. Fourteen days later, on October 18, 1965, Śrīla Prabhupāda entered New York (from Pennsylvania) on a bus. Except for his unusual appearance in the saffron robes of a *sannyāsī*, no one noticed.

A year earlier, in December, 1964, Pope Paul VI had distinguished himself by being the first Pope to visit India. In fact, Pope Paul VI had left Italy only once previously on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Jerusalem, thus being the first Pope to leave Italy in over 150 years. Although his visit to India had been protested by militant Hindu groups, the Pope endeared himself to millions of Hindus by quoting (in translation) from their scriptures (the Mundaka Upanishad and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad) in his

arrival address. "This visit to India is the fulfillment of a long-cherished desire," said the Pope. "Yours is a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire in deep meditation and silence and in hymns of fervent prayer. Rarely has this longing for God been expressed with words so full of the Advent as in the words written in your sacred books many centuries before Christ: 'From the unreal, lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality.'

"This is a prayer that belongs also to our time," the Pope continued. "Today more than ever, it should rise from every human heart. The human race is undergoing profound changes and is groping for the guiding principles and the new forces that will lead it into the world of the future. Your country has also entered into a new phase of her history. And in this period of transition you, too, feel the insecurity of our age, when traditional orders and values are changed, and all efforts must be concentrated on building the future of the nation, not only on a stable material basis but on firm spiritual foundations....Are we not all one in this struggle for a better world, in this effort to make available to all people those goods that are needed to fulfill their human destiny, and to live lives worthy of the children of God? Therefore we must come closer together, not only through the modern means of communications....We must come together with our hearts, in mutual understanding, esteem, and love. We must meet not merely as tourists but as pilgrims who set out to find God, not in buildings of stone but in human hearts. Man must meet man, nation meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In this mutual understanding and friendship in this sacred communion we must work together to build the common future of the human race."<sup>9</sup>

Striking the spiritual chords of the Indian people, the Pope became affectionately known as "*burra guru*," or "great holy man." Even as the Pope was visiting Bombay and Delhi, Śrīla Prabhupāda was in Vrindaban endeavoring by himself to complete the third volume of the mighty scriptural tome, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Having completed trips to India and New York and once again in Rome a document was issued from the Vatican entitled, "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions." This proclamation, an outcome of the three-year Roman Catholic Ecumenical Council sessions of Vatican II, was signed by "Paul, Bishop; Servant of the Servants of God, Together with the Fathers of the Sacred Council for Everlasting

Memory." Although concerned primarily with relations with the Jews, the document included pertinent sections on Buddhism, Islam, and also Hinduism, a religion which was characterized as follows:

From ancient times down to the present there is found among various peoples...the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrate their lives with a profound religious sense....In Hinduism men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust.<sup>10</sup>

While asserting the spiritual authority of the Church, the document broadens the Catholic perception of non-Christian faiths as follows:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks in sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life those rules and teachings which, although differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.<sup>11</sup>

In the views of many, this Declaration of Vatican II marked a watershed for the Roman Catholic Church. As such, numerous commentaries were written (both officially produced by the Church and otherwise) examining its significance.

Robert A. Grahman (S.J.), a Vatican authority, commenting on this extraordinary promulgation, says, "...it is the first time an Ecumenical Council has expressed such an open approach to the other great faiths of the world."<sup>12</sup> And, as Karl Rahner and Adolf Darlap write, "This document signified a break in the Churches' history of its relationship with the non-Christian world. Thus, a new position was taken by the Church which opened the way for changes in the dealings with peoples of other faiths that had been guided by other criteria for a millennia and a half. For the first time there was official recognition that non-Christians were not pagans, that is, the followers of a religion that was invented by men, and thus sinful and unable to merit God's grace. The salvific function of non-Christian churches was recognized for the first time by Christian orthodoxy. This was not just a modern liberal mentality but an integral element of Christian conviction. The result was dialogue."<sup>13</sup>

As theologian Richard P. McBrien remarks, "There was no more theolog-



ical imperialism. One faith may be the truth but other faiths also have the right to exist which leads to syncretism that all religions may amalgamate together to create a new faith of the future. The traditional ecclesiastical isolation of the Catholic Church was broken for the first time with the result that the Church was brought into the modern world with a willingness for dialogue now a possibility."<sup>14</sup>

In his introduction and commentary to the "Declaration," John M. Oesterreicher writes, "This Declaration holds a special place among the documents of Vatican II....In it a Council for the first time in history acknowledges the search for the absolute by other men and by whole races and peoples, and honors the truth and holiness in other religions as the work of the one living God....To that extent the Declaration is an acknowledgement by the Church of the universal presence of grace and its activity in the many religions of mankind."<sup>15</sup>

Also, in the official commentary (first published in 1967 in Germany, and in 1969 in America and England), Cyril B. Papali writes on the section of the declaration dealing with Hinduism, presaging Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission:

These words of the Council are not meant to be a description of Hinduism, but an indication of some of its outstanding spiritual values which may serve as spring-boards for a dialogue with it. And such a dialogue is of the utmost importance to the Church, for Hinduism is a religion that has molded the spiritual destinies of a large part of humanity for thousands of years and still remains a living force. Having absorbed, during its long lifetime, the peoples and religions of the Indian sub-continent, and spread its philosophy and spirituality over the greater part of Asia, *it now stands knocking at the portals of the Christian world.* (Emphasis added). Since the turn of the century, Hinduism has grown increasingly missionary and keen on entering into a dialogue with Christianity.<sup>16</sup>

These momentous new directions undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church would inestimably alter Western receptivity to the religions of the East. The process of modifying centuries-old prejudice had now begun—religious exchange was in vogue. Rather than denunciations of eastern religions as heretical, a new recognition of mutually-shared spiritual values was taking place by clerics and lay Christians alike. Thus, the initiative taken by the Vatican was, in effect, an official welcome invitation to just such a missionary as Śrīla Prabhupāda. This declaration, issued on October 25, 1965, was exactly one week after Prabhupāda's entry into New York.

### C. The Sociological Dimension: Prabhupāda Meets the Counterculture

Decades before Prabhupada's arrival West, other representatives from the Gauḍiṃa Vaiṣṇava tradition had come to these shores attempting to reach a western audience. In his essay in this volume, Gerald Carney discusses the sojourn West of Premānanda Bhārati at the turn of the century. In the 1930s several of Prabhupāda's Godbrothers came West; however, they were all relatively unsuccessful. The success of Prabhupada's mission, caused in part by the congruity of Prabhupada's arrival with the countercultural revolution taking place at the time, is described by Robert S. Ellwood, Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Southern California:

Swami Bhaktivedanta arrived in New York in the fall of 1965. From the Krishna consciousness perspective, one could well regard that time of arrival as highly providential. For conceding all the cautions appropriate to historical speculation, it seems that had his mission in this country commenced even a few years—possibly a few months—earlier or later, it would have been far less fruitful. Bhaktivedanta's timing caught the powerful rising tide of what was called the counterculture, which included within its spectrum of concerns a fascination with India and an exceptional openness to exotic, consciousness-expanding spirituality. This countercultural tide carried with it many new boats, some of which have stayed afloat despite the receding of that wave.<sup>17</sup>

This unique slice of history called the "counterculture," was basically an unofficially declared revolution by a vast segment of the youthful population of America (and abroad) against what was called "the establishment," i.e., anything resembling authority—government, churches, institutions, parents. Nationally, it was a time of general social turbulence, discord and mistrust as evidenced by the racial struggle, the Vietnam conflict, the assassinations of popular public figures. And, globally, this period in time had given rise to the population explosion, resulting in a world population in which more than half of its individuals were under the age of 30—and more widely educated than ever before. A vast fomentation of ideological exchange was occurring the world over due to the availability of increased global communications.

The *Weltanschauung* of an entire generation of young people was gradually changing. The big questions of life were being asked en masse by America's youth; dislocation from the cultural mainstream was rampant; alternative lifestyles and value systems were being explored. Conservative

views on sex, politics, race, language, dress, drugs and codes of behavior were increasingly frowned upon, and, for some, had become anathema.

Due to this growing dissatisfaction with Western culture, a particularly sharp focus on the East ensued. This was not something new. There had long been in America a tradition, both intellectual and popular, of interest in Eastern religion and spiritualism. For example, the early "Transcendentalists," such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), were heavily influenced by Indian philosophy and religion. This was reflected in their writings, as well as in those of John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) and T.S. Elliot (1888-1965), among others. However, this attraction to the East seemed to reach a peak during the countercultural period of the '60s, for it was reinforced by the stress of the times. Tom Hopkins, professor of religion at Franklin and Marshall College, points out that "devotional movements have always sprung up, I think without exception, in periods of tremendous social stress and change. They've always been the answer to the collapse of society. In a sense they're ideally suited to, tried and proven in, periods of social disorder. That's what Kali-yuga is all about, isn't it? It's when everything falls to pieces, when the world is no longer a secure place and a source of satisfaction....The counterculture era was a period when the problems of society were so obvious and so visible that you couldn't ignore them. We were fighting a crazy war, we had a crazy president, the whole society was riddled with contradictions in values and standards, and nobody was providing any kind of guidance and discipline. So, obviously these conditions did lend themselves to creating a mood of receptivity to a movement like yours, which did provide meaning, guidance, and discipline...."<sup>18</sup>

The sociological ramifications of the counterculture, especially in relation to Prabhupāda's arrival in America, were insightfully expressed by J. Stillson Judah, Professor Emeritus of Religion and Director of the Graduate Theological Union Common Library at Berkeley. In an eloquent appraisal of just where history had taken us, Dr. Judah lays bare the expectations of the '60s youth scene, with special attention to aspects of society that were rejected by them:

- (1) material success for themselves through competitive labor; (2) an education that promotes that end; (3) the accumulation of unneeded possessions for sense gratification; (4) authority, both civil and parental, that favors the status quo; (5) any war, such as the Vietnamese conflict, that is regarded as a product of imperialistic purposes with a selfish eco-

nostic basis; and (6) the hypocrisy of many belonging to the establishment, especially regarding civil rights and racial relationships. In addition, some felt that they were trying to practice many of the ideals upon which their former religious faiths were founded, but which they felt were so little practiced by other churchgoers...The devotees [of Krishna] sought a transcendental, spiritual solution to...[these] problems.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, Judah points out that those who converted to Krishna Consciousness were not only disenchanted with the materialistic world, but the countercultural subculture itself was a great source of disenchantment because here they found the same hypocrisy, exploitation, hedonism, and selfishness. Tom Hopkins points out that devotee countercultural youth were not ipso facto opposed to all authority but only hypocritical or deficient authority—those who did not practice what they preached. In Steven Gelberg's *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna*, Larry Shinn, then professor of religion at Bucknell University, says that the young people who became devotees felt a need for ethical mores and structure, which seemed to be lacking in the countercultural world. An intellectual as well as emotional fulfillment was desired and found in the form of the community of devotees and, more importantly, in the person of Śrīla Prabhupāda, who was seen to be nothing less than a saint. Here was someone who could be trusted, who followed the same standards he set for others. He gave guidance and instruction and taught by example.

Collectively, the youthful rebels of the '60s embodied the condition of Arjuna, who lovingly submitted to Krishna on the battlefield as depicted in *Bhagavad Gītā*. Confused as to their duty and purpose in life, some sought refuge, solace, and instruction from Prabhupāda, Krishna's representative; others did not.

The countercultural '60s was brief, virtually half a decade long—a kind of deep social spasm—and during that brief interval a Vaiṣṇava devotional movement took hold in the west. But, as Shinn points out, the movement was not in itself a result of the counterculture, because, at least in India, it existed millennia before the counterculture and, even with the demise of the '60s youth scene, the movement continued to evolve and transform itself well into the '70s, '80s and '90s. Hopkins goes further, "But now the movement is much broader and wider in scope and vision so...that it is no longer just a peer-group defense community against the world, but something that is a world—a world that has its own kind of lifestyle, standards, and vitality at every level."<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

We have shown that due to unusual legal, ecclesiastical, and sociological events a door to America was swung open in the year 1965, which allowed for the admittance of a venerable monk from an eastern tradition, Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Whether coincidental or providential (depending on one's perspective), these three factors provided a workable environment for the birth of the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* movement in the West. The suitability of this environment, however, may have proven negligible in the hands of one not qualified to rise to the task at hand. A stage may be beautifully set, but unless the player possesses the proper qualifications, the part will not come to life. Śrīla Prabhupāda was just such a qualified player, and not the least of his qualifications was the profound yet simple synchronicity of his actions with service to the divine. This consideration cannot be overestimated. In the introduction to the first volume of Satsvarūpa Dāsa Goswami's *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, resident Christian theologian at Harvard Divinity School, Harvey Cox, eloquently expresses this thought:

Yet, it must be added, Śrīla Prabhupāda was also a unique person. To say that the teachings of the ancient ones come to us through a series of teachers does not mean that the teachers are themselves interchangeable. If they were so faceless, there would be little point in writing a biography of any of them. But this life of Śrīla Prabhupāda is pointed proof that one can be a transmitter of truth and still be a vital and singular person, even—in a sense I now feel safe to use—in some ways “original.” Śrīla Prabhupāda lived through a particularly critical period in Indian history, that of British colonial rule and its aftermath. He worked with and among dozens of people who befriended, opposed, supported, or ignored him. He initiated *Back to Godhead* magazine. At what almost anyone would consider an advanced age [70], when most people would be resting on their laurels, he harkened to the mandate of his own spiritual master and set out on the difficult and demanding voyage to America. Śrīla Prabhupāda is, of course, only one of thousands of teachers. But in another sense, he is one in a thousand, maybe one in a million.<sup>21</sup>

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon has been explored in Steven J. Rosen, *Passage From India: The Life and Times of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992), pp. 57-64.

<sup>2</sup> Vṛndāvanadāsa Ṭhākura, *Caitanya Bhāgavata, Antya-līlā*, 4.126.

- 3 See Bhāgavata-māhātmya in *Padma Purāṇa, Uttara-khaṇḍa*, especially Text 51: *idaṁ sthānaṁ paritayajya videśaṁ gamyate mayā* ("Bhakti said: Leaving this place [Vṛndāvana] I will travel to foreign lands"). It is interesting that the passive verb *gamyate* is used in this verse, implying that she (*bhakti*) will be carried by someone to foreign shores. Regarding translating *videśaṁ* as "foreign shores" see Shrivatsa Goswami in Steven Gelberg, *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna: Five Distinguished Scholars on the Krishna Movement in the West* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), pp. 244-245.
- 4 Bhaktivinoda Thākura, "Nityānanda Suryodoy" in *Sajjana-toṣaṇī*, 1885, pp. 4-5.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 J. Gordon Melton, "The Attitude of Americans toward Hinduism from 1883 to 1983 with Special Reference to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness," David G. Bromley and Larry Shinn, *Krishna Consciousness in the West* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989) pp. 90-1.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 F. Stanley Karnow, *Viet Nam: A History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), p. 415.
- 9 *The New York Times*, December 4, 1964, p. 24. "Text of Speech to Non-Christian Groups in Bombay."
- 10 *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed., Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), pp. 661-2.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 659.
- 13 *Encyclopedia of Religion*, "Vatican Councils: Vatican II," Vol. 15, p. 199-206.
- 14 *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 12, "Roman Catholicism," pp. 429-445.
- 15 "Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II," Vol. 3, p. 1.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 17 Robert S. Ellwood, "ISKCON and the Spirituality of the 1960s," in Bromley and Shinn, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 102.
- 18 *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna*, *op. cit.*, 153.
- 19 J. Stillson Judah, *Hare Krishna and the Counterculture* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1974), p. 16.
- 20 *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna*, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
- 21 Harvey Cox, Foreword, in Satsvarūpa Dāsa Goswāmī, *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* (Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1980, Vol I), p. viii.

**THE DANCE OF THE DEXTEROUS HERMENEUTE  
TRANSFORMATION VS. CONTINUITY:  
TENSIONS IN SCRIPTURAL TRANSMISSION**

**Hermeneutical Strategies in the Commentaries  
of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda\***

Tamal Krishna Goswami

In a tradition that claims to express timeless truths, maintaining the authority and continuity of its literature becomes especially important. The ongoing believing community may insist on the immutability of its canonical scripture, but the very enterprise of translation, not to speak of commentary, resists enclosure. Jonathan Smith, in a seminal essay, "Sacred Persistence," stresses this dynamic tension: "Where there is a canon, it is possible to predict the *necessary* occurrence of a hermeneute, of an interpreter whose task it is continually to extend the domain of the closed canon over everything that is known or everything that exists *without* altering the canon in the process" (Smith 1982, 48). For canon incorporates questions of authority and innovation simultaneously; to survive it should be both stable and adaptable. An able interpreter will always respect the vigilant guardians of tradition who protect the canon's sanctified domain; hermeneutical strategies, while contextualizing the inherited truths within contemporary new cultural categories, must never render them unrecognizable. Still, scriptural transmission, particularly translation, is never merely a change of language, for the translator must constantly interpret the texts in the light of everchanging circumstances.

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1896-1977), founder of the

---

\*Originally presented at the American Academy of Religion conference in San Francisco, Monday, November 24, 1997. This paper may only be cited or duplicated with the express permission of the author and the *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies*.

Hare Krishna Movement and author of some fifty volumes of translation and commentaries, traced his lineage to the 15th-century saint Śrī Caitanya (1486-1534). Caitanyaism, or more correctly Gauḍiṇya Vaiṣṇavism, considers Śrī Caitanya to be an incarnation of the Godhead with other gods subordinate to him. The tradition traces its line further back to the 13th-century teacher Madhva and, the tradition holds, to the creator Brahmā, and before him the Godhead Krishna. As a translator and interpreter of Sanskrit and Bengali texts, Prabhupāda served as a medium between these distant authorities and his modern Western readership. As founder, prophet, and priest of a new religious movement,<sup>1</sup> he saw his writings as going beyond exegesis, as blueprints for spiritual change; as cathartic agents meant to agitate a revolution in consciousness. His purpose was to transplant an entire culture—root, trunk, branches and all—into an alien soil. He had to speak the language of a people vastly disparate from the scripture's original recipients, without compromising the fidelity of the tradition.

Prabhupāda's translations and commentaries make claims theologically from the text, disavowing modern techniques of textual and historical investigation. Questions of dating and authorship, for example, are typically not the concern of those who stand in their own disciplic line of succession. In assessing the strategies that underlie his work, we should not expect to find the methodologies that precisely duplicate any found historically in the Christian West. Recent studies in South Asian sacred text traditions demonstrate their uncomfortable fit within generic hermeneutic descriptions, much less biblical ones.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is always helpful to discover parallels within and between Eastern and Western textual traditions. A multivalent approach, which takes seriously a tradition's own exegetical voice while listening for its resonance with others, is essential for properly assessing the hermeneutical strategies of its representatives. Our view of A. C Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda's interpretations must take account of both *text* and *context*. Before considering their underlying presuppositions, a brief introduction to his style of presentation is in order.

We will concern ourselves less here with Prabhupāda's five volumes of letters, thirty-seven volumes of conversations, and more than sixty volumes of lectures—all of which were published posthumously and are accepted as canonical by ISKCON's faithful. While they operate under the same assumptions, Prabhupāda gave primary importance to his formal translations and summary studies,<sup>3</sup> and it is upon these that we focus. Except in the



case of his three summary studies, texts are given a verse-by-verse treatment. They are first presented in their original Sanskrit or Bengali script, immediately followed by a Roman diacritical transliteration. Each word is then separately glossed in an English lexical study, followed by an English translation of the entire verse and a "purport" that unpacks its meaning. Prabhupāda did most of his literary work in the hours after midnight, sitting down with the commentaries of prominent predecessors before giving his modern audience a fresh translation and purport in the light of disciplic succession.

For Prabhupāda, scripture is divinely inspired, hence, infallible. He writes: "Vedic knowledge emanates from the breathing of the Personality of Godhead; therefore, whatever Lord Kṛṣṇa speaks is Veda, or perfect knowledge" (Prabhupāda 1989a, 731).<sup>4</sup> Prabhupāda explains further: "Among the *munis*, or learned men conversant in Vedic knowledge, Vyāsa is the greatest because he explained Vedic knowledge in many different ways for the understanding of the common mass of people in this age of Kali. And Vyāsa is also known as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa; therefore Vyāsa also represents Kṛṣṇa" (Prabhupāda, 547).<sup>5</sup> Obviously, the terms "Veda" and "Vedic" have, for Prabhupāda, a very broad application.<sup>6</sup> As a divine emanation, scripture enjoys the same eternal status as the Godhead; that the Vedic compiler Vyāsa is seen as an incarnation, allows, simultaneously, for the Veda having an authored origin and yet having none.<sup>7</sup> The *Purāṇas* and other later texts share a divine status similar to that of the Veda, according to Prabhupāda, a view with some support among both Indian and Western scholarly traditions.<sup>8</sup>

If Vyāsa is the compiler/author of all Vedic literature (using the term in its broadest sense), it is reasonable to expect a uniformity of meaning throughout. Prabhupāda declares, "There is complete agreement among the *Upaniṣads*, *Vedānta-sūtra*, *Vedas*, *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*" (Prabhupāda 1982, 32). For Prabhupāda, the wide range of Vedic subject matter is governed by the axiomatic truth that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is Prabhupāda's "canon within the canon," similar to Luther's focus on Christ as the unifying principle of biblical literature. Commenting on Kṛṣṇa's statement in the *Bhagavad-gītā* 15:15, "By all the Vedas, I am to be known," he explains, "In all Vedic literature, beginning from the four Vedas, *Vedānta-sūtra* and the *Upaniṣads* and *Purāṇas*, the glories of the Supreme Lord are celebrated....Therefore, the purpose of the Vedas is to understand Kṛṣṇa" (Prabhupāda 1989a, 730-1).<sup>9</sup> The necessity of a unitary semantic thesis—whatever it may be—is common to all

Indian schools of thought. By having at least one good interpretive device, apparently contradictory passages can be brought into conformity with canon (Mumme 1992, 70). Not only does this allow a work such as the *Gītā* to be seen as a single, unified text; all the canonical texts may then appear as a simultaneous revelation, supporting a single meaning and even anticipating all future development and change.<sup>10</sup>

Using scripture to interpret scripture is the natural consequence of such textual harmony. A host of proof texts can be marshaled in support of the pivotal thesis. It should not come as a surprise that Prabhupāda depends largely on scriptural backing for support of his arguments, eschewing what he refers to as personal, speculative opinions. He explains his view, with reference to Rūpa Gosvāmin, foremost of Caitanya's disciples and author of many canonical works: "He [Rūpa Gosvāmin] does not manufacture anything. He gives immediate evidence—reference to the authorized scripture. That is the way of presenting things. Not, 'I think,' 'In my opinion.' ...in Vaiṣṇava philosophy, even Caitanya Mahāprabhu, although He was Kṛṣṇa Himself, whenever He spoke, immediately gave evidence from the scripture. Even Kṛṣṇa, while speaking *Bhagavad-gītā*, also gave reference to the *Vedānta-sūtra*...That is the way of authorized presentation" (Prabhupāda 1994, 530). Orthodox treatises like those of Rūpa Gosvāmin are often a series of arguments framed within scriptural citations. Prabhupāda's commentaries, too, like Jewish Midrash, though they may range far afield, will call on distant texts to either clarify a particular verse or liberally punctuate what is more an elaborate sermon than textual explication. The view, however, is always through the "eye of scripture" (*śāstra-caṅśus*).

But viewing the medieval or ancient past requires more than ordinary vision; the common humanity of author and interpreter that Schleiermacher suggested, may not necessarily furnish an intuitive grasp of the bygone author's intent. Illuminating remarks by traditional intermediaries—whether rabbis and church fathers or roshis and gurus—link the modern interpreter to the primary canon. More accurately, the commentaries, subcommentaries, and glosses "are not so much appendages to an otherwise fixed and completed work;" rather, they "form, hermeneutically, integral parts of a continuing argument or text" (Deutsch 1988, 170).

In commentarial traditions, the commentator's religious authority becomes especially important (Sheridan, 1992, 109). Not just anyone is authorized to comment on sacred texts, as Prabhupāda explains: "All transcendental messages are received properly in the chain of disciplic succes-

sion. This disciplic succession is called *paramparā*. Unless, therefore, *Bhāgavatam* or any other Vedic literatures are received through the *paramparā* system, the reception of knowledge is not bona fide" (Prabhupāda 1987, 195).<sup>11</sup> Clearly, pedigree is crucial to Prabhupāda; he lists his genealogical descent at the start of his *Gītā* commentary—he is the thirty-second spiritual master in an unbroken line that begins with Kṛṣṇa.

While the bona fide commentator retains a healthy respect for the previous commentaries, he must be sensitive to the present and future audience's special needs. Ancestral legitimacy is not a substitute for the personal realization required to creatively appropriate scriptural authority. A keen peripheral vision that penetrates the past and future—referred to traditionally as *tri-kāla-jñā*, something akin to biblical prophecy—enables the commentator to accurately chart the present.<sup>12</sup> Prabhupāda discusses his own transmission ethic with regard to balancing past and present:

Personal realization does not mean that one should, out of vanity, attempt to show one's own learning by trying to surpass the previous *ācārya*. He must have full confidence in the previous *ācārya*, and at the same time he must realize the subject matter so nicely that he can present the matter for the particular circumstances in a suitable manner. *The original purpose of the text must be maintained* [Prabhupāda's italics]. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. (Prabhupāda 1987, 202)

That "interesting manner" goes far beyond rhetorical flourishes. Much of Prabhupāda's commentary (Midrash again comes to mind, though the same could be said of all commentary traditions) is motivated by surface irregularities in the text—odd phrasings, unusual syntax or vocabulary. And as Midrash frequently sorts out narrative confusion—what happened to whom and when?—Prabhupāda provides us details of characters' backgrounds, motivations, etc. Often, however, when his commentaries do not just clarify the texts but go clearly beyond them, a purport's elasticity can make some wonder at the liberties he takes.<sup>13</sup> These are the opportunities Prabhupāda seizes for either theological or homiletic interpretations.

Scripture is for Prabhupāda the principal means of defining his Church (as much as the Church becomes for his followers a means to define scripture<sup>14</sup>). In the case of ISKCON, where the founder is also the primary interpreter of the text tradition, scripture and Church are inextricably connect-

ed. The centrality of the founder/interpreter's authority becomes all the more crucial when the audience of followers is geographically, culturally, historically, and linguistically foreign to the tradition. One is reminded of Paul's mission to the Gentiles, which is in essence a reinterpretation of the gospel in a Hellenistic context. Prabhupāda's task is no less. He has to form a Church—a body of believers—from a people as geographically and philosophically disparate from each other as from the tradition.

The epic *Mahābhārata* and equally narrative *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* prove a rich resource of typologies that Prabhupāda uses to draw his readers close. A theology that includes the esoteric practice of role modeling, in which absorption in all the minutiae of a particular Kṛṣṇa associate is the focus of meditation, lends itself well to typological exegesis. Kṛṣṇa's associates are not the only ideals; so too are Caitanya's.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, every guru and outstanding Vaiṣṇava in history is a potential exemplar, in a manner that does not distinguish hagiography from history. Hindu cyclical time offers the paradigm of regress, which upgrades past events from real to archetypal. Today's practitioners measure their progress against heroes of a yesterday that spans thousands of years.

Prabhupāda makes remarkably little allowance for modernity. His exegetical method, while clear and theological is, above all, literal. Applied to texts like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which are replete with geneological histories, he considers the original intent of the authors and the meaning for the believing community today to be the same, with the conviction that the plain meaning discernable in the text "now" is what it was then. As an example, he reads as fact the *purāṇic* accounts of creation, without reducing them, either historically or culturally. He is not willing to concede, as even Origen was, that at times the sacred texts err. While there is nothing quite resembling Origen's threefold exegesis—a moral and an allegorical dimension to the "flesh" or literal meaning of the scripture—and certainly not even a hint of Bultmannian demythologizing, a sophisticated development involving theological reflection, ritual performance, and moral obligation, elevates Prabhupāda's explications above what some might consider naive literalism.

Prabhupāda galvanizes his readers theologically by harnessing the twin phrases, "Supreme Personality of Godhead" and "devotional service," his unique translations for the two key Sanskritic terms, *bhagavān* and *bhakti*. Ordinarily, we expect translation to be a step down from the original with something being lost, but in translating these terms, Prabhupāda acceler-

ates their meaning, and in doing so, establishes them as the governing principles of his theology. In the theological phrase, *the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, “the greatness of God is communicated by the word ‘supreme,’ intimacy with the divine is indicated by the word ‘personality,’ and the ultimate theism, or ‘divine nature’ or ‘essence of divinity’ of this ‘supreme personality’ is indicated by the otherwise rarely used English word ‘god-head’” (Schweig 1995). The second phrase, *devotional service*, Prabhupāda’s translation for *bhakti*—which others simply translate as “devotion,” “worship,” or “love”—is considered by Prabhupāda to be synonymous with *dharma*. *Dharma* is normally understood as “religion,” “law,” or “duty,” but Prabhupāda explains it as the essential irreducible quality of the living being, i.e., *service*.<sup>16</sup> “This ontological sense of the word *dharma* as ‘service’ is related to the translation of the important word *bhakti* as ‘devotional service’: When a person’s natural inborn quality of service is transformed back into one’s original manifestation of service to God, this is called *bhakti*” (Schweig). By emphasizing that every living being can achieve perfection through *devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, Prabhupāda is able to convey to his community of believers the universal nature of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. At the same time, these twin phrases themselves proclaim the *kerygmatic* (proclaiming) nature of scripture that presupposes a new event of understanding as the ultimate goal of its reading.

That “new event,” the transformation of the reader, has within Vedānta traditions been a part of a three-way dialectic among careful reading, argumentation, and transformation (Clooney 1994, 141). Prabhupāda’s scholarship, as he frankly admits, is only to further what he believes is the scripture’s primary purpose: “*Bhagavad-gītā* is well-known in the western countries. But because it was not presented as it is, there was not a single devotee of Kṛṣṇa...[in]the whole [of Western] history. *Bhagavad-gītā* is meant for making the reader a devotee of Kṛṣṇa” (Prabhupāda 1989b, vol5:361). While such outspoken proselytizing may appear to narrow the *Gītā*’s otherwise broad appeal, the moral imperative that one be personally “recomposed” has its roots in such stalwart commentators as Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, leading one scholar to proffer the slogan: “no information without transformation” (Clooney 160). Fleshing out the details of practice such a change would require is for Prabhupāda an implied exegetical necessity.

If Prabhupāda seems at times too “preachy,” if his agenda is all too clear, so too is the unmistakably apocalyptic nature of his chosen texts. We are living in an age of darkness, they tell us, Kali-yuga, an increasingly debilitating

era of perversity and human degradation. What little remains of our already brief lives should be dedicated to reviving our dormant Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The great universal vision that Arjuna beholds in the *Gītā*'s Eleventh Chapter, announces: "Time I am, the great destroyer of the worlds, and I have come here to destroy all people" (Prabhupāda 1989a, 577).<sup>17</sup> A sense of urgency guides Prabhupāda's purports as much as it propels his movement, his followers, and, in a very personal way, his own life, near its end from the moment he set foot in America.

The following analogy, one that I believe Prabhupāda would have approved, may serve as a fitting close. In his translations and commentaries, Prabhupāda is as single-minded as Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to be. He has implicit faith in the text and its commentaries as one would have for the deity or for the words of one's guru. Scriptural transmission is his "yoga," as the military art is the practice of yoga for Arjuna; each views his enterprise as if its success will determine the fate of numerous others. As both "dance" in battle, invoking mantra-driven "weapons" to slay the common enemy, ignorance, victory demands of each an unusually resourceful application of mastered skills. The plan of battle must be ever revised and updated, which for Prabhupāda means that his "yoga of scriptural transmission" is always as much a transformation as it is a translation, an exercise in preserving the canon's authority, while extending its boundaries. For, after all, the agile hermeneute is a dancer whose field is the sacred land of canon. Dancing with "exegetical ingenuity" to a fusion of traditional melodies and current rhythms, he attempts to captivate the minds of the most contemporary as well as the most conventional.

## ENDNOTES

1. I examine these Weberian/Wachian categories in my article, "Servant of the Servant—A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness."
2. Two recent publications illustrating a wide variety of text/context interdependencies in South Asian traditions are *Texts in Contexts—Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, ed. Jeffrey R. Timm, and *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon—Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. Laurie L. Patton.
3. The summary studies are *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* (a summary of Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja's *Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*), *The Nectar of Devotion* (a summary of Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*), and *Kṛṣṇa, The Supreme Personality of Godhead*, a summary of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s Tenth Canto). The principal commentaries are to the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*.

4. This comment is with reference to BG 15:15.
5. Refer to *Bhagavad-gītā* 10:37: *muninām aṅy ahaṁ vyāsaḥ*, “of the sages, I am Vyāsa.”
6. See Rahul Peter Das, “‘Vedic’ in the Terminology of Prabhupāda and His Followers.” Das summarizes three uses of the term by Prabhupāda (p.34): “‘Vedic<sub>1</sub>’ approximates most closely to what the Western classical indologist would understand by this term; ‘Vedic<sub>2</sub>’ refers to texts containing what is to Prabhupāda Vedic thought and which are hallowed inasmuch as they are derived from Vyāsa; and ‘Vedic<sub>3</sub>’ is a narrower application of ‘Vedic<sub>1</sub>,’ referring only to the *Saṁhitās* (as contrasted to the *Upaniṣads*) and thus continuing an ancient usage of the term.”
7. Daniel P. Sheridan in “Vyāsa as Madhva’s Guru” p. 120, notes a similar strategy on the part of Madhva, the disciplic predecessor of Prabhupāda.
8. See Thomas B. Coburn, “The Study of the Purāṇas and the Study of Religion,” and Fredrick M. Smith, “Purāṇaveda.” Both authors consider evidence including some traditional sources favoring such a view. Coburn concludes: “[value-neutral critical editing] allows one to affirm, on academic grounds, that the *Purāṇas* have developed from an early nucleus to their present extent, and it also allows one to affirm (or to deny) that that nucleus was of divine origin, as a matter of personal faith. Similarly, whether Vyāsa be understood as mortal editor, or divine incarnation, is a matter on which academic judgement not only can but must remain silent” (p. 351).
9. *Bhagavad-gītā* 15:15: *vedaīś ca sarvair ahaṁ eva vedyo vedānta-kṛd veda-vid eva cāhaṁ*. “By all the Vedas, I am to be known. Indeed, I am the compiler of Vedānta, and I am the knower of the Vedas.”
10. See Arvind Sharma, “The *Bhagavad-gītā*: Its Western and Indian Interpretations,” p. 111. Sharma indicates that the Vedāntists justify semantic consistency on the analogy of *Vedāntasūtra* 1.1.4 which urges that all different parts of Vedic revelation be interpreted harmoniously. Prabhupāda refers to this same verse in his commentary to *Bhagavad-gītā* 15:15: “The Vedas give us direction by which to understand Kṛṣṇa and the process of realizing Him. The ultimate goal is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Vedānta-sūtra* (1.1.4) confirms this in the following words: *tat tu samanvayātī* (Prabhupāda, 1989, 731). See also Jeffrey R. Timm, “Scriptural Realism in Pure Nondualistic Vedānta.” Timm explains the view of 15th c. Vaiṣṇava ācārya Vallabha, a founder of his own disciplic line and a contemporary of Caitanya: “When a ‘unity of sense’ (*ekavākyatā*) among these scriptures is achieved—when the understanding arises that every statement in every scripture shares one common meaning—then knowledge of God results” (p. 133).
11. In discussing interpretive authority, Sheridan states the traditional view: “For an understanding of the Vedas, one must have God for a guru, or someone who has God for a guru” (Sheridan, 1992, 120).
12. To explain their predictive powers, traditional authors like Vyāsa were said to be *tri-kāla-jña*. While such vision was normally acquired by mystic yoga, Prabhupāda asserts that a true devotee of Kṛṣṇa is similarly endowed: “Those who have reached the highest perfectional stage of mystic power and can see everything in the past,



present and future are called *tri-kāla-jñas*. Similarly, the devotees of the Lord can see everything clearly that is in the revealed scriptures....Devotees do not have to endeavor for any *yoga-siddhi*, or perfection in mystic powers. They are competent to understand everything by the grace of the Lord, who is sitting in everyone's heart" (Prabhupāda, 1989, vol. 3.1:472). For a discussion of Prabhupāda as prophetic author, see my article, "Servant of the Servant—A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness."

13. Prabhupāda's commentarial "creativity" has elicited a good deal of scholarly dismay. See, for example, Robert D. Baird, "Swami Bhaktivedanta and the *Bhagavad-gītā*," in *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad-gītā*, ed. Robert N. Minor, (Chapter 10). A detailed textual defense of Prabhupāda's purports is offered by ISKCON *saṅnyāsi* Sivarama Swami, in a soon-to-be-released work, *The Bhaktivedanta Purports—Perfect Explanations of the Bhagavad-gītā*.

14. A comparison could be made here, to no small advantage, to Tertullian of Carthage's 3rd-century argument from law of the Church's possession of the scriptures. See Robert M. Grant's, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (pp104-6).

15. Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavas are generally known as *rūpānugas*, followers of Rūpa Gosvāmin.

16. See *Bhagavad-gītā*, 18-20.

17. *kālo 'smi loka-śaya-kṛt pravṛddho lokān samāhartum iha pravṛttaḥ* (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 11.32).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baird, Robert D., 1991. *Essays in the History of Religions*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Bultmann, Rudolf, 1961. *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Clooney, S.J., Francis X., 1994. "From Anxiety to Bliss: Argument, Care, and Responsibility in the Vedānta Reading of *Taittirīya* 2.1—6a." In *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, 5:139-169, ed. Laurie L. Patton. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Coburn, Thomas B., 1980. "The Study of the Purāṇas and the Study of Religion." In *Religious Studies* 16: 341-352, ed. H. D. Lewis. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Das, Rahul Peter, "Vedic" in the Terminology of Prabhupāda and His Followers." *ISKCON Communications Journal*, Vol. 4, No.2, ed. Śaunaka Ṛṣidāsa. A revised version of this essay appears in the current volume of JVS.
- Deutsch, Eliot, 1988. "Knowledge and the Tradition Text in Indian Philosophy." In *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, eds. Gerald J. Larson and Eliot Deutsch, 165-173. Princeton: Princeton University Press.



- Goswami, Tamal Krishna. "Servant of the Servant: A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness." Presented at "The Founders and Shapers of the World Religions" conference of the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace, in Washington, D.C., 25-29 November, 1997.
- Grant, Robert M., 1963. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- Origen. *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth. New York: Harper & Row.
- Mumme, Patricia Y., 1992. "Haunted by Śaṅkara's Ghost: The Śrīvaiṣṇava Interpretation of *Bhagavad-gītā* 18:66." In *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, 5:69-84, ed. Jeffrey R. Timm. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Patton, Laurie L., ed. 1994. *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Prabhupāda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.
- . 1982. *Śrī Īsopaniṣad, Discovering the Original Person*. 11th Edit. [Los Angeles]: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- . 1987a. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, First Canto. [Los Angeles]: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- . 1987b. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Third Canto, Part One. [Los Angeles]: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- . 1989a. *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. [Los Angeles]: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- . 1989b. *Conversations With Śrīla Prabhupāda*, Vol. 5. [Los Angeles]: The Bhaktivedanta book Trust.
- . 1994. *Collected Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda*, Vol. 1. Sandy Ridge, NC: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust Archives.
- Schweig, Graham M. "Universal and Confidential Love of God: Two Essential Themes in Prabhupāda's Theology of Bhakti." Prepared for the "Prabhupāda Centennial Conference," sponsored by ISKCON in Detroit, MI., November 3-5, 1995. A version of this paper appears in the current volume of JVS.
- Sharma, Arvind, 1995. "The *Bhagavad-gītā*: Its Western and Indian Interpretations." *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, ed. Steven Rosen.
- Sheridan, Daniel P., 1992. "Vyāsa as Madhva's Guru: Biographical Context for a Vedāntic Commentator." In *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, 7:109-125, ed. Jeffrey R. Timm. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Smith, Frederick M., 1994. "Purāṇaveda." In *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, 4:97-138, ed. Laurie L. Patton. Albany: State

University of New York Press.

Smith, Jonathan Z., 1982. "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon." In *Imagining Religion*, 3:36-52. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Swami, Sivarama. *The Bhaktivedanta Purports: Perfect Explanation of the Bhagavad-gītā*. Forthcoming. Badger, CA: Torchlight Publishing, Inc.

Timm, Jeffrey R., 1992. "Scriptural Realism in Pure Nondualistic Vedānta." In *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, 8:127-146. Albany: State University of New York Press.

## UNIVERSAL AND CONFIDENTIAL LOVE OF GOD: TWO ESSENTIAL THEMES IN PRABHUPĀDA'S THEOLOGY OF *BHAKTI*

Graham M. Schweig

### Introductory Remarks

It has been almost thirty years since A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (hereinafter simply referred to as Prabhupāda) arrived in New York City, where he introduced the devotional path of serving and loving Krishna (God) to Americans, which ultimately led to the pervasive worldwide movement that it is today. Prabhupāda brought with him from India a spiritual vision and practice that espoused certain fundamental principles of religiosity and devotion that he observed as the very heart of religion: God is the supreme loving object, humans are meant to love him and serve him, and between God and humans is the ultimate loving relationship. Prabhupāda did not accept the idea of a merely exclusive revelation or a chosen people or a singular savior. Rather he claimed that God appears in various forms at various times and in different places on this earth, to speak a language of religion to every culture, in order to establish different aspects of his law and his love. For Prabhupāda, God's love for humanity and his capacity for appearing before finite human creatures were far too powerful to be restricted or limited to a particular time, place, or culture.

Prabhupāda taught that God has been accessible to all peoples in varying religious traditions, as long as the principle of loving service to God has been taught and practiced sincerely. This principle, according to Prabhupāda, is indeed universal and he preached this principle actively. However, the same tradition that gave Prabhupāda this universal, open and inclusivistic vision, also gave him a more esoteric, confidential and lofty

vision of the highest realm of religion: a vision of God as the supreme lover. From Prabhupāda one learns that loving intimacy with the supreme Lord is not only possible, but is the ideal and ultimate attainment of religion. Although Prabhupāda always stressed that we are eternally servants of God, a relationship which is fundamental to even the most intimate of relationships with Him, for the devotee, God was no longer that majestic King, nor was He that jealous God, nor was He any longer that supreme "creditor" of sins to whom we were to become eternally indebted. Rather, for Prabhupāda and the tradition out of which he came, intimacy with the divine constituted religious perfection.

The ultimate goal and perfection of all religion is to become a confidential lover of God.<sup>1</sup> Prabhupāda prescribed a practice of rigorous spiritual and moral discipline to realize a love for God in our everyday activities that is intensely intimate and mystical. It was this spiritual discipline that became so attractive to persons from religious traditions and cultures everywhere. Prabhupāda's openness to other diverse religious traditions as forms of *bhakti* ("loving devotion and service to God") on the one hand, and his emphasis on the depth of confidential or intimate love for God on the other, I believe, is one of Prabhupada's most significant theological contributions. Below I will review Prabhupāda's statements on the universality of religion and the trans-sectarian accessibility of God, along with his statements on the ethical and theological particularity of Vaishnava religion, and further, a confidential vision of God which both inclusively reveals and exclusively conceals intimacy with the divine.

With the founding of ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) in 1966 by Prabhupāda,<sup>2</sup> the Vaishnava movement has spread around the globe. This worldwide diffusion has radically increased the interaction between Vaishnavism and other religious traditions. Such an encounter is not something new, however. The Caitanya Vaishnava movement, from which ISKCON emerged, has encountered other religious traditions, both indigenous and foreign, throughout its 500 year history.<sup>3</sup> In this century, since Caitanya Vaishnavism has been transplanted into virtually every major culture of the world, the opportunity to experience a plurality of traditions has become great. Certainly, Vaishnavism had never encountered, as a unified movement confined primarily to the South Asian subcontinent, the sheer breadth of cultural and religious diversity that Prabhupāda did when he inaugurated the worldwide spread of Vaishnavism three decades ago. Therefore, the Vaishnava "view" of other tradi-

tions has been developing over some time and has reached a new level of understanding due to Prabhupāda's influence.

The best sources for revealing Prabhupāda's view of other religions are his own written and recorded words. For this study, Prabhupāda's scriptural commentaries, recorded lectures, conversations and interviews, as well as the writings of some of Prabhupāda's disciples, have been used. Specifically, I will focus primarily on Prabhupāda's scriptural commentaries here, since Prabhupāda himself stressed the ultimate importance and authority of these teachings to his disciples. Also, these commentaries contain essential teachings from the traditional commentaries of previous *ācāryas*, or saintly scholars of the Vaishnava traditions, such as Śrīdhara Swāmī, Jīva Goswāmī, Viśvanātha Cakravartī, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and others. Thus Prabhupāda's scriptural commentaries are an essential source of information because they link the Vaishnava movement of the past with the present global manifestation of Vaishnavism, while revealing what was important to him theologically as a powerful religious leader of this century.<sup>4</sup>

### Definition of Religion as “*Bhakti*”

Prabhupāda spoke a universal language of religion. This is reflected in the way he used the word “religion” itself. He rarely identified his Vaishnava teachings as a “religion,” and he characteristically spoke or wrote of the “principles” of religion, rather than merely religion. Religion in the abstract singular, which he corresponded to the Sanskrit word *dharma*, is generally presented in the “universal” sense of religion, or as an expression of the unity of religion. Prabhupāda referred to “religions” (in the plural) very infrequently as compared with his use of the word religion in the singular. He used the plural form of the word in discussions involving the sectarian particularities of religion, or the imperfections of religion. *Religions* were temporary and worldly designations. But *religion*, in the singular, was eternal and spiritual.

In his introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā*<sup>5</sup> and in many other places, Prabhupāda emphasizes that “devotional service” to God is genuine religion. “Devotional service” is Prabhupāda's unique translation of the Sanskrit word *bhakti*, which signifies his definition of religion, or *dharma*.<sup>6</sup> *Bhakti* is often translated by others simply as “love,” “worship,” or “devotion”<sup>7</sup>—but here devotion is an adjective describing the substantive “service.” In order to appreciate the significance of this translation of *bhakti*, one must consider

Prabhupāda's discussion on *dharma*.

*Dharma* is explained as the essential irreducible quality of the living being, which is *service*.<sup>8</sup> This ontological sense of the word *dharma* as "service" is related to the translation of the important word *bhakti* as "devotional service": When a person's natural inborn quality of service is transformed back into one's original manifestation of service to God, this is called *bhakti*. Therefore, *bhakti* is the perfection of this essential quality of servitude in human nature.

This definition of *bhakti* forms the basis for a very inclusivistic view of other traditions since the tendency to ultimately serve God is the natural inborn quality of everyone.<sup>9</sup> This inclusivistic view of religion also relates to God, the object of *bhakti*. God is one and does not belong to any particular religion. Prabhupāda expresses this non-sectarian approach in the following words:

God is one, and God does not belong to this or that religion. In Kali-yuga, different religious sects consider their God to be different from the God of others, but that is not possible. God is one, and He is appreciated according to different angles of vision. In this verse the word *kaivalyat* means that God has no competitor. There is only one God. In the *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad* (6.8) it is said, *na tat-samaś-cābhyadhikaś-ca dṛṣyate*: "No one is found to be equal to Him or greater than Him." That is the definition of God.<sup>10</sup>

Realization of our relationship with God can emerge from any religion: Christianity, Islam, etc.<sup>11</sup> Prabhupāda states that "gold is gold whether possessed by a Hindu, a Muslim or a Christian."<sup>12</sup> When the personal aspect of God is worshiped, it is *bhakti-yoga*,<sup>13</sup> i.e., establishing a connection with God through devotional service and developing a loving, devotional relationship with Him. Throughout his writings Prabhupāda repeatedly states that all true religion establishes certain principles: the knowledge of the personal aspect of God, our position in relation to God, the means by which we can surrender to God and return to Him, and our ultimate, eternal loving relationship with God.

Elsewhere Prabhupāda presents statements on the nature of religion which are even more inclusivistic. In numerous places he states that any practice or religious system which leads to the devotional service of the Lord can be called religion,<sup>14</sup> and that religious rites prescribed in scriptures are meant for gradually leading humans from material existence to

the devotional service of God.<sup>15</sup> He thus implies that *all* religious traditions (theistic or non-theistic) are capable of leading to *bhakti*.<sup>16</sup>

The actual realization of the individual is the primary concern for the Vaishnava, and not the particular religious designation. To be born or identified as a Christian, Muslim or Jew does not make one religious, and these designations are temporary and fleeting along with the body. In a conversation with a Catholic priest, Prabhupāda states that in *bhakti-yoga* one becomes free from designations such as Christian, Hindu, Muslim, etc., and serves God only:

To practice *bhakti-yoga* [loving service to God] means to become free from designations like "Hindu," "Muslim," "Christian," this or that, and simply to serve God. We have created Christian, Hindu, and Muhammadan religions, but when we come to a religion without designations, in which we don't think we are Hindus or Christians or Muhammadans, then we can speak of pure religion, or *bhakti*.<sup>17</sup>

Included in this *bhakti* concept of religion are several exclusivistic aspects as well. Traditions that do not accept a supreme, personal God and human devotion to and relationship with that God, would be excluded from the category of true religion, because, as aforementioned, religion is solely devotion to God. *Bhakti* is not just devotional service to anything or anyone, but requires the supreme, personal God as its object:

*Bhakti-yoga* means connecting ourselves with Kṛṣṇa, God, and becoming His eternal associates. *Bhakti-yoga* cannot be applied to any other objective; therefore in Buddhism, for instance, there is no *bhakti-yoga* because they do not recognize the Supreme Lord existing as the supreme objective. Christians, however, practice *bhakti-yoga* when they worship Jesus Christ, because they are accepting him as the son of God and therefore accepting God. Unless one accepts God, there is no question of *bhakti-yoga*. Christianity, therefore, is also a form of Vaishnavism because God is recognized. Nonetheless, there are different stages of God realization. Mainly, Christianity says, "God is great," and that is a very good assertion, but the actual greatness of God can be understood from *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. Accepting the greatness of God is the beginning of *bhakti*. *Bhakti-yoga* also exists among Muhammadans, because God is the target in the Muslim religion. However, if there is no recognition of a personal God—in other words there is only impersonalism—there is no question of *bhakti-yoga*. *Bhakti-yoga* must include three items:

the servitor, the served, and service. One must be present to accept service, and one must be present to render service. The *via media* is the process of service itself, *bhakti-yoga*. Now, if there is no one to accept that service, how is *bhakti-yoga* possible? Therefore if a philosophy or religion does not accept God as the Supreme Person, there is no possibility of *bhakti-yoga* being applied.<sup>18</sup>

Although *bhakti* may be present in many religious traditions, Prabhupāda asserts that there are “different stages of God realization.” Here he states that “accepting the greatness of God is the beginning of *bhakti*,” which is known as *aiśvarya*. The highest stages of *bhakti* involve the experience of God’s “sweetness” or intimacy with the divine, which is known as *mādhurya*. These beginning and advanced stages of God realization, comprising the full range of experiences available to the devotee, are both universal and accessible on the one hand, and yet confidential and esoteric on the other, as I will discuss in some detail below.

Exclusivistic statements can be found among various religious traditions of *bhakti*. Such statements can also be made by followers to others within specific *bhakti* traditions with regard to confidential levels of perfection. Prabhupāda states in numerous places that religion means devotional service and that perfection of religion means to be constantly engaged in devotional service to God. He emphasizes elsewhere that without devotional service, so-called religious principles are only cheating. Prabhupāda insists that the individual must simply accept the sublime position of the Supreme Person and render spontaneous loving service to Him.

Following in the footsteps of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, we are trying to convince everyone that the devotional service of the Lord is enjoined in every scripture. If a person is religious, he must accept the supreme authority of the Lord, become His devotee and try to love Him. This is the real principle of religion. It does not matter whether one is Christian, Mohammedan or whatever. He simply must accept the sublime position of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and render service unto Him. It is not a question of being Christian, Mohammedan or Hindu. One should be purely religious and freed from all these material designations. In this way one can learn the art of devotional service.<sup>19</sup>

### Religious Unity and Diversity

It is important to review how Prabhupāda explains the unity and diversity



of religion, as this will shed more light on the nature of Prabhupāda's inclusive and exclusive statements. The variety in religion arises according to differences in body and mind, differences of time and place, the culture of the people and their ability to understand.<sup>20</sup> This is one explanation given by Prabhupāda. But he provides another, perhaps more important dimension: a variety of religions exists because all religions are not on the absolute level of *bhakti*, which is understood as the essence of all true religion.

There are many different religions throughout the world because they are not all on the absolute platform of devotional service....On the material platform, religious systems are different....The genuine religious system is that which enables one to become a lover of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In the words of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.6):...“The supreme occupation [*dharma*] for all humanity is that by which one can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted in order to completely satisfy the self.” On this platform there is nothing but the service of the Lord. When a person has no ulterior motive, there is certainly oneness and agreement of principles. Since everyone has a different body and mind, different types of religions are needed. But when one is situated on the spiritual platform, there are no bodily and mental differences. Consequently on the absolute platform there is oneness in religion.<sup>21</sup>

Prabhupāda further accounts for the variety of religion by analyzing each according to the qualities of material nature, or *guṇas*, as they are explained in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.<sup>22</sup> Prabhupāda writes on the devotee's proper attitude toward these varieties of religion which are influenced by material qualities:

...we should not criticize other's methods of religion. There are different types of religious systems operating under different qualities of material nature. Those operating in the modes of ignorance and passion cannot be as perfect as that system in the mode of goodness. In *Bhagavad-gītā* everything has been divided into three qualitative divisions; therefore religious systems are similarly categorized. When people are most under the modes of passion and ignorance, their system of religion will be of the same quality. A devotee, instead of criticizing such systems, will encourage the followers to stick to their principles so that gradually they can come to the platform of religion in goodness.<sup>23</sup>

Religion and worship varies according to the quality of human faith, as it is influenced by the modes of material nature.<sup>24</sup> And as is indicated by the above passage, the duty of a devotee is to encourage individuals engaged in various religious practices, to apply the principles they have received sincerely, in order to become gradually elevated to religion in the mode of goodness.

While Prabhupāda acknowledges that all religion recognizes God, whether known as Allah, Krishna, etc.,<sup>25</sup> he plainly states that people generally do not know the highest perfection of religion is the attainment of devotional service.<sup>26</sup> Prabhupāda states that the ultimate goal of all religions is to satisfy the Lord,<sup>27</sup> and claims that most people are simply unaware of or unable to achieve religion's ultimate end, which is *bhakti*. He states that one may follow the religious principles of his own tradition, but such practice must lead to *bhakti* in order to accomplish the true goal of religion, which is to love God: "One may be very expert in following the religious principles of his own sect, but if he has no tendency to love the Supreme Personality of Godhead, his observance of religious principles is simply a waste of time."<sup>28</sup> Thus, Prabhupāda states that there cannot be any religious principles without devotional service to the Lord,<sup>29</sup> and that real religious unity exists only at the level of devotional service.<sup>30</sup>

When we are on the material platform, there are different types of religions—Hinduism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, and so on. These are instituted for a particular time, a particular country, or a particular person. Consequently there are differences. Christian principles are different from Hindu principles, and Hindu principles are different from Mohammedan and Buddhist principles. These may be considered on the material platform, but when we come to the platform of transcendental devotional service, there are no such considerations. The transcendental service of the Lord (*sādhana-bhakti*) is above these principles. The world is anxious for religious unity, and that common platform can be achieved in transcendental devotional service.<sup>31</sup>

Prabhupāda also makes further distinctions. Religion contains or is influenced by these external aspects of time, place, culture, etc., while it still may possess *bhakti*. However, religion can also be false—if its purpose or result is other than devotional service. There is true religion and false religion, which includes pretentious religion and irreligion. True religion is created by God, not humans, as seen in the verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *dhar-*

*maṁ tu sāksāt bhagavat prāṇitam*: the principles of religion are directly established by the Supreme Lord.<sup>32</sup> Religion consists of God's revealed order, or his laws or codes.<sup>33</sup> Prabhupāda states, "...*dharma*, or religion, cannot be manufactured by a human being. Religion is the law or code of the Lord. Consequently, religion cannot be manufactured even by great saintly persons..." Pretentious religion is the outward show of standard religious practices or rituals, such as attending church or temple services, while the practitioner remains preoccupied with material intentions.<sup>34</sup> Irreligion can be of many varieties, but essentially applies to one who has forgotten one's eternal relationship with God and engages in activities other than devotional service.<sup>35</sup> Voluntaristic or subjectivistic creations of religion fall under the heading of irreligion. Self-made religion, i.e., wherein one thinks that whatever practice one concocts is the path of salvation, is another form of irreligion. Any new or fashionable "religion" which opposes the eternal principles of religion as related in the world's traditional religious scriptures is unacceptable, for true religion is not manufactured; rather, it is revealed by God. Prabhupāda emphatically states that "no one can manufacture actual law at home, nor can one manufacture actual religion."<sup>36</sup> Intentional misinterpretation through manipulation or modification of the word of God is also rejected because it is a deceptive or cheating form of religion.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Prabhupāda states that most people in this age will not know the difference between what is religion and what is "defective" religion,<sup>38</sup> and that many pseudo-religions will be introduced.<sup>39</sup>

The order or law of genuine religion is established by God, who appears at will, at different times and in various places and forms. The ideal human response to those established laws is to follow them and surrender to God. Prabhupāda states the following:

It is not a fact that the Lord appears only on Indian soil. He can manifest Himself anywhere and everywhere, and whenever He desires to appear. In each and every incarnation, He speaks as much about religion as can be understood by the particular people under their particular circumstances. But the mission is the same—to lead people to God consciousness and obedience to the principles of religion. Sometimes He descends personally, and sometimes He sends His bona fide representative in the form of His son, or servant, or Himself in some disguised form.<sup>40</sup>

Once the Lord manifests Himself in order to establish the laws of religion

(*bhāgavata-dharma*), humans have the opportunity to surrender lovingly unto God. Prabhupāda defines religion as surrender, and states that the only religion and the highest religion is to surrender unto the supreme Lord.<sup>41</sup> In numerous places, Prabhupāda states that surrender is what Krishna requires, as supported by his final instruction to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: to completely give up all varieties of religion, and just surrender (*mām ekaṃ śaraṇam vraja*)<sup>42</sup> to Krishna, i.e., God.

We have seen that the essential ingredient of religion according to Prabhupāda is *bhakti*, the *sine qua non* of religion. Without *bhakti* there is no religion. Everyone, regardless of place or time, is capable of achieving pure devotional service or *bhakti*, and *bhakti* is ultimately the only religion. All genuine religious traditions can lead to or practice a form of devotional service, but the mere designations or identities of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, etc., are rejected, because without sincere application of the laws of God through these traditions in the lives of the practitioners, such designations become meaningless and part of false self-conceptions. Thus, according to Prabhupāda, God Himself establishes and reveals religious principles at anytime, in any place, either personally or through His representative. The human creation of religion, and the misapplication or misinterpretation of religion, all designate false religion.

### The Encounter with Christianity

One can observe Prabhupāda's principle of universal *bhakti* at work when he looks at Christianity. More than any other religion, Prabhupāda comments on the thought and practice of Christians. As we have already seen above, Christian traditions can be accepted as genuine religion. Furthermore, Jesus Christ is accepted as the son of God, and sincere Christians are accepted as devotees of the Lord. Prabhupāda has great respect for Jesus Christ and his true followers. He states that Jesus is a Vaishnava,<sup>43</sup> and that he is "our *guru*,"<sup>44</sup> since he is God's representative.<sup>45</sup> If one actually becomes Christ conscious, one becomes Krishna conscious.<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere, he states that one who is actually guided by Jesus Christ attains liberation.<sup>47</sup>

A theological criticism that Prabhupāda puts forward is that Jesus Christ is God's representative and son, but he is not the Father, nor is he the only son. Prabhupāda reasons that even an ordinary man may have many sons, so why should God be limited to having only one?<sup>48</sup> As for the homogeneity of the Father and the son, Prabhupāda explains that although the

Father and the son are one, because the son is the representative of the Father, the son is never accepted as being equal to or identical with the Father.<sup>49</sup> Jesus Christ revealed himself as the son of God and Krishna revealed Himself as God, the Father of all living beings.<sup>50</sup>

Prabhupāda criticizes certain aspects of the modern day practice of the Christian faith. First and foremost, Prabhupāda stresses that the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," applies to all living creatures and not just to humans. This biblical commandment he considers to be the perfect law of non-violence, and finds unacceptable the notion that the word "kill" was intended to mean "murder," thus applying only to humans.<sup>51</sup> The argument that the killing of animals is acceptable because they have no soul simply demonstrates, according to Prabhupāda, that many Christians possess incomplete knowledge of scripture.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Prabhupāda states that many Christians are unfaithful to Jesus Christ, since they continue to sin (i.e., kill living beings) while allowing him to accept suffering on their behalf.<sup>53</sup>

### Religious Practice

As we have seen, *bhakti* is a universal quality of religion which is, theoretically, available to anyone. But there is a requirement, and that is, according to Prabhupāda, the sincere and steadfast application of religious principles in an individual's life. Prabhupāda consistently emphasizes that one must accept and strictly practice the religious principles prescribed in one's particular tradition.<sup>54</sup> Prabhupāda states that one must follow what the scriptures say, and emphasizes the importance of practicing one's chosen process.

Real civilization is not concerned simply with man's animal needs but with enabling man to understand his relationship with God, the supreme father. One may learn about his relationship with God by any process—through Christianity, through the Vedic literatures or through the Koran—but in any case it must be learned. The purpose of this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is not to make Christians into Hindus or Hindus into Christians but to inform everyone that the duty of a human being is to understand his relationship with God. One must learn this, otherwise he is simply wasting his time by engaging in animalistic propensities. We must all try to love Kṛṣṇa, or God. If one has a process, he should practice it, or he can come and learn this process.

One should not begrudge the selection of one process over another.<sup>55</sup>

Any religious tradition is accepted as a means but it is the sincerity and practice of the individual that are essential for understanding one's relationship with God. At the same time, Prabhupāda explains clearly that genuine religion must contain certain required and regulated practices which are essential. In the universal practice of *bhakti*, or devotional service, there are nine processes: hearing, chanting, remembering, serving the lotus feet, worshipping, praying, serving, becoming a friend of the Lord, and surrendering everything to Him.<sup>56</sup> Of these, "chanting" the names of God is essential for advancement.<sup>57</sup> For this age, Prabhupāda teaches, there is no other way than the chanting of the names of God.

The chanting of the holy names of Krishna, or Vishnu, is the central practice of the Hare Krishna movement and the historical Vaishnava traditions. But this process is not limited to certain names of God, nor to a particular tradition:

The Lord is the proprietor of all the universes, and therefore He may be known in different places by different names, but that does not in any way qualify the fullness of the Lord. Any nomenclature which is meant for the Supreme Lord is as holy as the others because they are all meant for the Lord. Such holy names are as powerful as the Lord, and there is no bar for anyone in any part of the creation to chant and glorify the Lord by the particular name of the Lord as it is locally understood.<sup>58</sup>

The universal practice of the repetition of God's names is not limited by time, place, culture, etc.

...everyone, the learned and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the Hindus and the Muslims, the Englishmen and the Indians, and the *candalas* and the *brahmanas*, can all hear the transcendental sounds and thus cleanse the dust of material association from the mirror of the heart. To confirm the Lord's mission, all the people of the world will accept the holy name of the Lord as the common platform for the universal religion of mankind.<sup>59</sup>

Yet Prabhupāda has explained that different names of God invoke different aspects of His presence and reflect varying degrees of intimate or distant relationships with Him. The name of Krishna, according to

Prabhupāda, is one of the most intimate names of God.

There are other practices that are seen as essential to all true religion. Prabhupāda states that religious principles depend upon and begin with the following of four basic restrictions which result in the development of four corresponding spiritual qualities. These four restrictions are: no intoxication, no eating of meat, no illicit sex, and no gambling. A person who is not intoxicated can develop the qualities of discipline and austerity; mercifulness or compassion develops in a person who does not eat flesh; by refraining from illicit sexual activities the quality of cleanliness or purity develops; and in one who does not gamble, the quality of truthfulness can be found.<sup>60</sup>

Prabhupāda emphasizes the importance of each of these four prohibitions in various places in his writings. But of these four, the prohibition against meat-eating is repeatedly emphasized. Prabhupāda acknowledges that animal killing is sometimes part of religious practices, but he completely denounces animal-killing and meat-eating, stating that it is essentially an act of ignorance, religious or non-religious.<sup>61</sup> Animal-killing (which Prabhupāda equates with meat-eating) must be given up in order to attain true religiousness.<sup>62</sup> In pure spiritual traditions such as Vaishnavism there is no place for meat-eating or animal sacrifice.<sup>63</sup>

### Levels and Stages within *Bhakti* Religion

Prabhupāda delivered the universal message of *bhakti*, that all humans everywhere can learn to love and serve God. He accepted that adherents to various religious traditions can attain love of God. However, he also presented the most confidential theology of *bhakti*, which is rarely accessible to anyone. Because realization of the most confidential and intimate aspects of Godhead requires the highest levels of advancement and realization in *bhakti* practice, it is less often achieved than the earlier stages of realization of God's majesty and greatness. Furthermore, very few traditions, if any, can offer knowledge and vision of the intimate activities of the Supreme the way Vaishnava sources do. One religion may cultivate a certain stage of *bhakti* realization, and a second tradition may cultivate a more or less advanced level. The highest and most confidential knowledge of God's most intimate love and activities is found in the scriptural revelations of Vaishnavism, specifically that of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The first stages of God realization are the inclusive and accessible levels of religion, levels of

the worshipable majesty of God that are common to other devotional and theistic traditions of the world. The more advanced stages of God realization are the more intimate and confidential levels of religion which are found only in more esoteric and exclusive forms of religion.

The idea of confidentiality is not Prabhupāda's original idea, for this idea is expounded upon in the sacred texts of the tradition. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Prabhupāda translates the word *guhya* as "confidential." As Prabhupāda points out in his commentary to the Ninth Chapter of the *Gītā*, Krishna discloses "the most confidential knowledge" (*guhyatamam*) to Arjuna.<sup>64</sup> Arjuna later acknowledges this confidential knowledge by stating, "By my hearing the instructions You have kindly given me about these most confidential spiritual subjects, my illusion has now been dispelled."<sup>65</sup> Krishna explains to Arjuna that his "supreme secret" (*paramam guhyam*) should be given to others: "for one who explains this supreme secret to the devotees, pure devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he will come back to Me."<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, Krishna explains that confidential knowledge of him is not possible for "those who are not austere, or devoted, or [those who are not] engaged in devotional service, nor to one who is envious of Me."<sup>67</sup>

Prabhupāda's focus on this confidential relationship between the soul and God is expressed in his unique translation of several Sanskrit words for "God." Prabhupāda rarely uses the word "God" to translate the many words or phrases that refer to the supreme Lord. The most common Sanskrit word found for God in the Vaishnava texts that Prabhupāda translated, is the rich term *bhagavān*. The meanings for this word span the range of God's majesty and intimacy. The word consists of the stem *bhaga*, which literally means "excellence," "beauty," "dignity," "majesty," as well as "love," "affection," "amorous pleasure," etc., and the possessive suffix *-vat*. A literal translation might be simply the "one who possesses all excellences." Prabhupāda at times will translate the word *bhagavān* by the phrase "Supreme Lord," or "Supreme Person." Most often, however, the somewhat protracted and uniquely illuminating phrase "the Supreme Personality of Godhead" appears throughout his writings, translations, and recorded lectures and discussions. In this theological phrase, the greatness of God is communicated by the word "supreme," intimacy with the divine is indicated by the word "personality," and the ultimate theism, or "the divine nature" or "essence" of divinity<sup>68</sup> or this "supreme personality" is indicated by the otherwise rarely used English word "godhead." The profuse application of this



phrase throughout Prabhupāda's writings is itself an expression of the theocentric focus of *bhakti* in its universal and confidential senses.

God is indeed the "supreme personality" because he alone can reciprocate with each and every individual soul in any form of divine affection. The confidential theology of *bhakti* involves five levels or stages of intimacy in the relationship between the soul and God. These five stages of *bhakti* indicate five general categories of experiences or dynamic relationships, or *rasa*, with God, possessing different degrees of intimacy and intensity of love.<sup>69</sup> These five types of relationships or *rasas* of love for God are the following:

1. *Śānta-rasa*: The word *śānta* means "peace." This *rasa* is the passive love of awe and reverence for a great and powerful person. The devotee experiences the majesty or greatness of God either in his direct personal presence or in his presence throughout everything. This experience of God can include the fear of God and his power as well. The loving connection or attachment (*āśakti*) to God at this first stage is described as appreciation of God's greatness (*guṇa-māhātmya*), attachment to God's beauty (*rūpa*), and attachment to the remembrance of God (*smaraṇa*). The passive experience of pantheism and God's omnipresence is found at this level. However, *śānta* is an inactive, passive, more contemplative relationship with God, unlike the other more intense, active, and dynamic forms of love that follow. At this stage, one is fully aware of one's finite existence and is fully in awe of the Lord's greatness.

2. *Dāśya-rasa*: The word *dāśya* means "servitude." This *rasa* is the active love of a devotee expressed by dedicated acts of devotion. The experience of devotion at this stage is likened unto a devoted servant with his or her master. The attachment or loving connection with God here is one of obedient but loving service for him. At this stage, God is often identified in various religious traditions as the divine "Father," or the "King" of the universe, or the divine "Mother." The experience between the devotee and God is active and dynamic, that of a servant with a superior, like a parent or a master. At this stage, the great distance between the soul and God experienced in *śānta-rasa* is lessened through dynamic service.

3. *Sākhya-rasa*: The word *sākhya* means "friendship." Here the relationship with God is hardly passive as in *śānta-rasa*, nor is it the experience of love for a superior. Rather it is the reciprocal love existing between very dear and intimate friends. The loving dynamic between the devotee and God at this level of *bhakti* is one of reciprocal equality. This *rasa* of loving exchanges between friends found between the devotee and God, constitutes the first truly intimate relationship with the divine, since intimacy was absent at the prior two levels of *bhakti* in which the experience of God's majesty prevailed. At this stage, there is no longer any distance of majesty or formality; rather, this distance is replaced with the reciprocal sharing of intimate dealings.

4. *Vātsalya-rasa*: The word *vātsalya* means "paternal love." At this level the intensity of intimacy has increased so much so that the devotee possesses feelings of caring and nurturing for God the way an affectionate parent cares and nurtures for the dependent child. Here the dynamics within the formality of the *śānta* and *dāsyā* relationships are reversed, and the intimacy of love has intensified to such an extent that a devotee feels as though God were dependent on him or her, as a child is on its parent. At this stage, intimacy reaches a new level of intensity in which the soul cares for God in a nurturing way.

5. *Mādhurya-rasa*: The word *mādhurya* means "amorous love." This highest and most intense form of intimacy with the divine is characterized as the feelings of intimacy that lovers have for each other (*kānta*). Here the attachment to God is experienced in total self-surrender of love (*ātma-nivedana*), and further, by being filled up and overflowing with and drowning in God's love (*tat-maya*), overwhelming the lover with affectionate feelings for the beloved. Here the qualities of reciprocation in *sākhya* and the caring and nurturing in *vātsalya*, are both blended with utter self-surrender. At this most advanced level of intimacy, the devotee becomes a confidential lover of God.

Each of these five *rasas* are to be viewed as progressively greater stages of experiences of intimacy up to the highest, *mādhurya-rasa*, yet they are also recognized as diverse perfectional levels of love for the divine. It is also

possible to view these stages collectively as various qualities in the natural human experience with God: Prabhupāda taught that for the devotee in true *bhakti* religion, it is ultimately possible and very natural to appreciate God's greatness, to serve God, to share with God, to care for God, and to be utterly filled with God's love and to love God with one's whole being.

The most sacred revelation of the highest intimacy or *mādhurya-rasa* with God is known by the Caitanya tradition of Vaishnavism as the *rāsa-līlā*, which connotatively refers to the divine display of a dance-in-the-round of love between Krishna, who is the supreme Lord in his most intimate form as a cowherd boy, and his divine counterparts the Gopis, cowherd girls. The *rāsa-līlā* episode is narrated in five chapters within the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. A quick summary of these five *rāsa-līlā* chapters, or *rāsa-līlā-pañcādhyāyī*, is the following: (1) The Gopis or cowherd maidens leave their homes, duties, virtually everything, to meet with Krishna at night in the moon-lit forest. (2) The Gopis look everywhere for Krishna after he disappears from them, and they find only the one special Gopī (who is identified by the later tradition as Rādhā) who, like the others, is abandoned. (3) They experience intense emotions and feelings of separation and longing for Krishna. (4) After reappearing before them, Krishna expresses his gratitude and appreciation for them. (5) And finally, Krishna dances with each one of them simultaneously, each Gopī believing that she has the exclusive affectionate attention of Krishna during the dance, while heavenly beings joyously look upon this divine marvel from the sky, showering flowers down upon all of them. The married and unmarried milk-maidens of Vṛndāvana, or Gopis, are considered the most intimate associates of the Lord, and therefore are themselves the paradigmatic exemplars of *mādhurya-bhakti* with Krishna.

Prabhupāda presented these revelations of divine intimacy with great caution and warning. He consistently expressed throughout his writings and in his discussions, concern that persons hearing the confidential and intimate dimensions of Godhead must be capable and qualified to appreciate episodes like the *rāsa-līlā* of Krishna. He was concerned that persons would not misinterpret the *rāsa-līlā* in a way that was disrespectful. For example, in his introductory remarks when presenting a summary study of this treasured episode, he states that less advanced devotees or persons outside the tradition might mistake the *rāsa* dance to be "like the ordinary dancing of young boys and girls."<sup>70</sup> Prabhupāda states that descriptions of the higher stages of *bhakti* are not prevalent in many traditions the way the lower stages

of *bhakti* are. Indeed, this higher stage of *bhakti*, even within the Vaishnava tradition itself, is uncommon since it is so confidential and elevated. Prabhupāda states that, "The Lord's activities in confidential love are very rarely disclosed to the general devotees who are attracted by devotion mixed with knowledge and mysticism. Such activities are the inconceivable pastimes of the Lord."<sup>71</sup>

Throughout his writings and discussions, Prabhupāda gives his students repeated warnings about taking such sacred and confidential knowledge of Krishna cheaply. He refers to the "professional readers of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*" who "plunge into the confidential topics of the pastimes of the Supreme Lord, which they seemingly interpret as sex literature."<sup>72</sup> He remarks further about such readers in the following words:

Such men usually go to the most confidential part of the literature without undergoing the gradual process of understanding this grave subject. They usually plunge into the subject matter of the *rāsa* dance, which is misunderstood by the foolish class of men. Some of them take this to be immoral, while others try to cover it up by their own stupid interpretations. They have no desire to follow in the footsteps of Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī.<sup>73</sup>

Prabhupāda goes so far as to say that any outsider who misinterprets the confidential knowledge of the *Bhāgavata* should not have any access to this literature.<sup>74</sup> Prabhupāda insists over and over that the only way one can understand the confidential messages of God concerning the intimate activities of the Lord and loving relationships with his devotees is by engaging in the process of *bhakti*, and by receiving this literature directly through genuinely advanced and confidential devotees. "It is stated here that this confidential knowledge is extremely difficult to understand, yet it is very easy to understand if one takes shelter of a pure devotee.... anyone who attains the spiritual platform by the grace of the spiritual master can also understand this confidential knowledge."<sup>75</sup> Thus Arjuna could receive the confidential knowledge from Krishna because Arjuna was Krishna's very dear friend.<sup>76</sup>

The conditioned soul within the material world can neither understand nor appreciate how the devotee in the material world can render confidential service to the Lord out of feelings of ecstatic love and always engage in pleasing the Supreme Lord's senses. Although seen within this material world, the pure devotee always engages in the confidential service of the Lord. An ordinary neophyte devotee

cannot realize this; therefore it is said, *vaiṣṇavera kṛiyā-mudrā vijñāneha nā bujhaya*. The activities of a pure Vaiṣṇava cannot be understood even by a learned scholar in the material world.<sup>77</sup>

It is clear from the foregoing discussion on the confidentiality of *bhakti* that a person must become qualified and spiritually worthy in order to understand the intimate knowledge of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Moreover, one must be qualified by the right persons and from the right sources. The intimate knowledge of God remains confidential and secret in the same way that a graduate studies text book on science is readable by anyone but truly understandable only by a specialist. However, even among the Vaishnava specialists, who are the most honored and worshipped, the most intimate knowledge of God should sometimes remain concealed. An example of this is when Caitanya Mahāprabhu inquires from Rāmānanda Raya about confidential topics of Rādhā and Krishna, and at a certain point Rāmānanda hesitates to go any further. Caitanya insists that Rāmānanda delve further into the topic, then suddenly realizes that no more should be said as he quickly covers Rāmānanda's mouth with his hand.<sup>78</sup> This interaction between Caitanya and Rāmānanda is significant: the Vaishnava tradition preserves the dignity of the deity in its innermost confidential life. At a certain point, there are just some things that can only be shared between the soul and God, and no one else. Thus Prabhupāda cautions us about attempting to prematurely jump to the intimate knowledge of Krishna's interactions with the Gopīs in the *rāsa* dance:

The activities of Kṛṣṇa are not ordinary but divine. If we can understand this, we immediately become liberated. We need only understand the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa with the *gopīs*. These pastimes are not ordinary. In the material world, a young man wants to dance with many young girls, but Kṛṣṇa's dancing with the *gopīs* is different. Because people cannot understand Kṛṣṇa, when they hear about Kṛṣṇa's dancing with the *gopīs*, they take this as some kind of concession, and say, "Now let us dance with young girls." In this way they go to hell. Therefore we have to learn from the proper person about Kṛṣṇa's activities. We should not immediately try to understand Kṛṣṇa's dealings with the *gopīs*, for they are very confidential. These dealings are given in the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, and this indicates that we have to understand Kṛṣṇa as He is by first reading the preceding nine cantos. When we have understood these nine cantos, we can go on to the tenth. In this way we can understand that Kṛṣṇa's activities are not ordinary but divine, and we can immediately become liberated.<sup>79</sup>

Prabhupāda's contribution is in his genuine application of this paradox within *bhakti*: it is both broadly inclusivistic and exclusivistic at the same time. This idea of maintaining both a very inclusivistic, universalistic approach to religion on the one hand, while maintaining the lofty exclusivistic and personalistic intimacy of Godhead on the other, is a balance that expresses the accessibility of the deity and yet preserves the dignity of the deity at the same time. Indeed, the genuinely earned, spiritually developed and truly realized state of intimacy with the divine is an experience rarely achieved by those in theistic traditions, including specifically the *bhakti* traditions of Vaishnavism. Thus the revelations of intimacy with the divinity are presented by Prabhupāda to all in a way that is absolutely respectful and yet utterly attractive that it instills in the devotees of his tradition a sense of worship and honor for the supreme divinity who, in his innermost sanctum of the spiritual world, engages in such wondrous exchanges with his dearest associates. There is no place in Prabhupāda's thought and practice for relating to these intimate revelations of God with a cheap familiarity in the form of blasphemous imitation or premature contemplation found among unqualified or insufficiently advanced souls. All of us can recognize and honor God's supreme life of intimacy, yet most of us will do so from a distance that is both respectful and ultimately conducive to a spiritual exaltation in these private revelations of God.

### Concluding Remarks

Vaishnavas accept those religions and those parts of religions that lead to or directly promote *bhakti*, and that other religious traditions which do not possess any qualities of *bhakti*, i.e., devotional service to a supreme personal God, are not genuine forms of religion. Certain religious practices, such as the chanting of God's holy names, are an essential part of *bhakti*. Also, certain ethical codes are considered prerequisite to any genuine religious practice. Prabhupāda acknowledges that it is rare to find someone who is able to follow all these ethical codes. Nevertheless, he stresses their importance. He also emphasizes that if certain religious practices are taken up, such as the chanting of the holy names of God, one will become capable of following these preliminary ethical codes.

It was not the object of this paper to present in any detail the theology of Vaishnavism. Here I have only touched upon two essential themes that Prabhupāda emphasized in the theology of *bhakti* and have only scratched the surface. But it should be noted that within the *bhakti* theology of Vaish-

navism, there are different degrees of intensity and intimacy in the possible relationships between God and His devotee. Moreover, there are different degrees in the development of *bhakti* from one religion to another. Prabhupāda states that Vaishnava *bhakti* is the richest presentation of *bhakti* theology: "The cult of Caitanya philosophy is richer than any other, and it is admitted to be the living religion of the day with the potency for spreading as *viśva-dharma*, or universal religion."<sup>80</sup> This understanding of Vaishnava *bhakti* represents the most exclusivistic position of Prabhupāda.

Although there are requirements for *bhakti*, giving it its own theological and ethical exclusivistic feature, *bhakti* is not limited to any particular culture, time, place, gender, race, etc., and can be found in other genuine religious traditions. Prabhupāda states that "...there is no religion save and except the devotional service of the Lord, though this may be presented in different forms."<sup>81</sup> As I have pointed out, even religious traditions which may not possess a pure form of *bhakti* are accepted by Vaishnavas in that their sincere followers can gradually be elevated to a point where they can take up pure devotional service.

Finally, the Vaishnava *bhakti* religion of Prabhupāda is neither heavily exclusivistic nor overly inclusivistic. Rather, I find a balance between these two. This balance of the exclusivity and inclusivity within the universality of *bhakti* and within the confidentiality of *bhakti* is significant, because it suggests the deeper elements of a true theological science—a balance and a healthy tension between the universal and the particular. Prabhupāda presents a formula for this balance when he states that "religion without philosophy is sentiment, or sometimes fanaticism, while philosophy without religion is mental speculation."<sup>82</sup> In the same way, religious exclusivity without philosophy and reason is imbalanced. Philosophic inclusivity without religious faith and devotion is also imbalanced. The former is sentimentality without understanding, and the latter is abstract speculation without application.

True theological science achieves such a balance between these two dynamics, especially when it can be witnessed in one who "practices what he preaches." The theological vision and the spiritual disciplines that Prabhupāda brought to New York City were carried from the sacred pilgrimage town of Vrindaban, near Agra in Northern India, especially sacred to those who worship the supreme Lord as Vishnu in his most intimate and ultimate form as Krishna. Prabhupāda was a kind of spiritual ambassador of Vaishnava *bhakti*, or the religion of loving devotion to Krishna. Indeed, among the five primary sects of Vaishnava *bhakti*, the Gaudiya Vaishnava, or the



Caitanya school, represented by Prabhupāda, was the first in the history of religion to introduce the world to the philosophy and practice of Vaishnavism to the extent that he did, around the globe to nearly every cultural corner of the earth, within the short span of twelve years. Prabhupāda's contribution cannot be dismissed by asserting the cultural readiness of Americans during the '60s or by the rise of modern technology and the increasing ease of global communications and transportation. Indeed, Prabhupāda utilized these to assist in the transmission of his message, but it was ultimately the message itself that possessed a power that went beyond anything that modern thought and technology could provide. India's ancient past was suddenly speaking to the world about intimate, selfless love for the supreme. Prabhupāda's message also survived negative media attention, prejudice and social oppression, as the movement continued to flourish and the serious lifestyle of Vaishnavas grew and persisted.

But it goes beyond this, because Prabhupāda, despite the apparently "sectarian" or "ethnic" appearances of the practices and ideas of Vaishnavism, connected with people everywhere. Prabhupāda's path, involving the wearing of traditional religious garb of Vaishnavas, and various "sectarian" practices such as the modes of ritual and worship involving the feeding, dressing, and worshipping of divine images, could easily promote the particularity or sectarian dimensions of his importation. Indeed, the strict recitation of hymns and chanting of God's names in the original classical Sanskrit language could also be seen as still another sectarian practice. Yet, like the other practices, the recitation of Sanskrit hymns is enchanting to people everywhere, and the singing of God's names in the streets of major cities throughout the world is so anachronous and yet so right at the same time. All these would seem to indicate anything but a universal language of religion by the mere strict adherence to traditional and cultural forms of the sect. Paul Tillich, the renowned Protestant theologian of this century, has suggested that religion becomes lasting and universally powerful by penetrating "into the depth of one's own religion, in devotion, thought, and action."<sup>83</sup> Prabhupāda has achieved just this for the Vaishnava tradition, and his contribution has not been in adding or compromising or inventing, but rather has been in the practicing, exemplifying and establishing of *bhakti*.

These questions are concerned with the relationship between the particularity and the universality of Prabhupāda's teachings. Paul Tillich suggests that "a particular religion will be lasting to the degree in which it negates itself as a religion."<sup>84</sup> How a religion "negates" itself Tillich explains as follows:



In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which the religion itself loses importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence.<sup>85</sup>

Perhaps Tillich had not encountered one such as Prabhupāda, for Prabhupāda did not "negate" his religion to be universally attractive. Quite the contrary. Neither the outward cultural or inner confidential particularities of the Vaishnava tradition was sacrificed or negated for the universal. He, along with his disciples, held the universality and particularity of the Vaishnava tradition in a certain dynamic tension which kept both vibrant and alive. In the celebration of the particularities of the Vaishnava tradition he hit a universal chord in persons everywhere. Indeed, acts of devotion conveying the universal and the particular of *bhakti* were regularly celebrated by Prabhupāda and his disciples around the globe: the willingness of Western and Oriental devotees who were originally raised in other religious traditions, to dance on street corners, celebrating love of God and exclaiming to all, often more passionately and more boldly than any lover does for a beloved, is an act that is testimony to the absolute attraction that Prabhupāda's universal and particular message has had and continues to have in this world.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī. *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (17 Vols.). Original transliterated and Sanskrit and Bengali Text Translated, and Commentary by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974-75). See *Madhya-līlā* 17.84. (References to this text and/or Prabhupāda's commentaries to this text will be made by first citing the name of the *līlā* section, then chapter and verse numbers when verse and commentary are both important. Or, just volume and page number will be provided if just commentary is important.)

<sup>2</sup> The best single source for examining the life and mission of Prabhupāda is the *Śrīlā Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, in six volumes, by Satsvarūpa dāsa Gosvāmī (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1980-83). The first volume, "A Lifetime in Preparation," covers Prabhupāda's seventy years before coming to the West, and the other five are devoted to tracing the development of the movement worldwide.

<sup>3</sup> In medieval times, the Islamic and Buddhist traditions were encountered; later, the presence of various Christian traditions were felt. Moreover, even in earlier periods of *bhakti* history, the confrontation of religious diversity was always present by specifically indigenous Indian religious traditions, India being one of the most reli-

giously diverse cultures of the world.

<sup>4</sup> How much and to what extent Prabhupāda's view of other religious traditions compares to the view of the original teachers of the Caitanya school is an intriguing and important topic. But it is not possible to explore this topic here. I would say, though, that such a study would find that Prabhupāda's view is very much continuous with and reflective of the original *bhakti* tradition and philosophers.

<sup>5</sup> A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, translation and commentary, *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1989), 28-31.

<sup>6</sup> I have written about the relationship between *dharma* and *bhakti* in Prabhupāda's writings in the article entitled, "Dharma: Nature, Duty, and Divine Service," *Back to Godhead Magazine*, Vol. 15, No. 12, 7-13.

<sup>7</sup> I have written about the complex meanings of the word *bhakti* in my thesis, entitled, "Axiological Analysis in Phenomenological Method: The Hermeneutic Task in Comparative Religion," Harvard Th.M. Thesis, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> See *Bhagavad Gītā*, 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Prabhupāda writes, "The real religion of the living being is his natural inborn quality, whereas pretentious religion is a form of nescience that artificially covers a living entity's pure consciousness under certain unfavorable conditions. Real religion lies dormant when artificial religion dominates from the mental plane. A living being can awaken this dormant religion by hearing with a pure heart" (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, Vol. 1., 76).

Prabhupāda also writes that true religion is the "...Reinstatement of the living entity in his original position of transcendental loving service to the Supreme Lord, which is free from the infections of desires for sense gratification, fruitive work, and the culture of knowledge with the aim of merging in the Absolute to become one with the Supreme Lord" (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, Vol. 1., 78).

<sup>10</sup> *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, with translation and commentary by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Cantos One through Ten in 30 Volumes (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1976-80), Canto 5, Vol. 1, 132.

<sup>11</sup> A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *Kṛṣṇa Consciousness: The Matchless Gift* (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), 70.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> This topic is discussed further below and reviewed in Prabhupāda's quotation from *The Path of Perfection* (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> Prabhupāda states that, "Anything which does not lead to the devotional service of the Lord is irreligion, and anything which leads to the devotional service of the Lord is called religion" (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 3, Part 2, 141). We find a similar statement: "In *Bhagavad-gītā* also we find that the Lord condemns all forms of religion

other than that which entails the process of surrendering unto the Supreme. Any system which leads one to the devotional service of the Lord, and nothing else, is actually religion or philosophy." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 3, Part 2, 16)

15 "Religious rites prescribed in the scriptures are meant to purify the mundane qualities of the conditioned souls to enable them to be gradually promoted to the stage of rendering transcendental service unto the Supreme Lord. Attainment of this stage of pure spiritual life is the highest perfection, and this stage is called *svārūpa*, or the factual identity of the living being" (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 1, Part 2, 183-4).

"Christians and Muslims are also Vaishnavas, devotees, because they offer prayers to the Lord. 'O God,' they say, 'give us our daily bread.' Those who offer this prayer may not know very much and may be at a lower stage, but this is a beginning, because they have approached God. Going to church or mosque is also pious... Therefore those who begin in this way will one day become pure Vaishnavas." (*Teachings of Queen Kuntī*, 135-6)

"According to the devotional process, one should simply accept such religious principles that will lead ultimately to the devotional service to the Lord....Anything that does not lead to the perfectional stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be avoided." (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 8.51)

16 "The conclusion is that all pious activity, fruitive activity, religious principles and renunciation must ultimately lead to devotional service." (*Caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 7, 102)

17 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *The Science of Self Realization*, pb., (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1977), 126.

18 *The Path of Perfection*, 118.

19 *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 9, 306.

20 "...there are many different types of religious systems according to the place, the disciples and the people's capacity to understand." (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 7, p. 325) Prabhupāda also states that "since everyone has a different body and mind, different types of religions are needed. But when one is situated on the spiritual platform, there are no bodily and mental differences. Consequently on the absolute platform there is oneness in religion" (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 7, 100).

Other, similar explanations for the diversity of religion can be found both in the Vaishnava scriptures and in Prabhupāda's writing. See *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 1, Part 1, 71; and Part 3, 56; Canto 6, Part 2, 167).

21 *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 9, 99-100. See also *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 7, 363.

22 See *Bhagavad Gītā*, Chapter 17, "The Divisions of Faith," 769.

23 *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 4, Part 3, 175.

24 "Thus we find different types of faith in this world, and there are different types

of religions due to different types of faith. The real principle of religious faith is situated in the mode of pure goodness, but because the heart is tainted we find different types of religious principles." (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 773)

Prabhupāda discusses the differences of religion according to the modes of material nature, *guṇas*, in numerous other places. See *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 1, Part 3, 214; *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 4, Part 3, 175.

25 *The Science of Self Realization*, 164. There are numerous other statements acknowledging the oneness of God and oneness in conceptions of God throughout Prabhupāda's writings.

26 "The highest goal of all religion is devotional service....Religious people generally do not know that the highest perfection of religion is the attainment of devotional service." (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 453)

27 "...sacrifice means to accept the supremacy of the Lord and thereby perform acts by which the Lord may be satisfied in all respects....There are different countries in different parts of the world, and each and every country may have different types of sacrifice to please the Supreme Lord, but the central point in pleasing Him is ascertained in the *Bhāgavatam*, and it is truthfulness. The basic principle of religion is truthfulness, and the ultimate goal of all religions is to satisfy the Lord" (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 1, Part 3, 275).

28 *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 8, Part 1, 305.

29 "...there cannot be any religious principle without devotional service to the Lord....there cannot be any religion or system of genuine philosophy for the advancement of the living entities without the principle of devotional service." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 3, Part 2, 15)

"Therefore, from all the evidence the conclusion is that without *bhakti*, devotional service, there is no question of religious principles. God is the central figure in the performance of religious principles." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 7, Part 3, 30)

30 "As far as religious principles are concerned, there is a consideration of the person, the country, the time and the circumstance. In devotional service, however, there are no such considerations. Devotional service is transcendental to all considerations." (*Caritāmṛta-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 25.121)

31 *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 9, 363.

32 This verse is *Bhāgavatam* 6.3.19 (Canto 6, Part 1, 162).

33 *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, Vol. 4, 262. "According to Vedic literature, religion consists only of the codes of law given by God" (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 4, Part 3, 95).

34 "Nondevotees may make a show of religion, but it is not very effective because although they ostentatiously attend a temple or church, they are thinking of something else....But a devotee who commits sinful acts, which he may do unwillingly or accidentally because of his former habits, is excused" (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 1, 176).

<sup>35</sup> Prabhupāda states that “any so-called religious system that is not in the line of devotional service is called *adharma-saṁsthāpana*. When people forget their eternal relationship with God and engage in something other than devotional service, their engagement is called irreligion” (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 3, Part 3, 346).

<sup>36</sup> “To create a new type of *dharma* has become fashionable in this age. So-called *svāmīs* and *yogīs* support that one may follow any type of religious system, according to one’s own choice, because all systems are ultimately the same. In *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, however, such fashionable ideas are called *vidharma* because they go against one’s own religious system. The real religious system is described by the Supreme Personality of Godhead: *sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja*. The real religious system is that of surrender to the lotus feet of the Lord....real religion is that which is given by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, just as real law is that which is given by the government. No one can manufacture actual law at home, nor can one manufacture actual religion....” (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 7, Part 3, 210-11)

“Even most people who claim to belong to the Vedic system of religion are actually opposed to the Vedic principles. Every day they manufacture a new type of *dharma* on the plea that whatever one manufactures is also a path of liberation. Atheistic men generally say, *yata mata tati patha*. According to this view, there are hundreds and thousands of different opinions in human society, and each opinion is a valid religious principle” (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 2, 78-9).

<sup>37</sup> “...the real religious system is that which leads one to become a devotee of the Supreme Lord. Therefore, anything opposed to this religious system of progressive Kṛṣṇa consciousness is called *vidharma*, *para-dharma*, *upadharma* or *chala-dharma*. Misinterpretation of *Bhagavad-gītā* is *chala-dharma*. When Kṛṣṇa directly says something and some rascal interprets it to mean something different, this is *chala-dharma*—a religious system of cheating—or *śabda-bhīt*, a jugglery of words. One should be extremely careful to avoid these various types of cheating systems of religion.” (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 2, 211)

<sup>38</sup> “The members of modern civilization manufacture defective religious principles through speculative concoction. This is not *dharma*. They do not know what is *dharma* and what is *adharma*....It may be concluded that *dharma*, religion, refers to that which is ordered in the Vedas, and *adharma*, irreligion, refers to that which is not supported in the Vedas.” (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 1, 56-7)

<sup>39</sup> “Now, in the beginning of Kālī-yuga, many irreligious principles are in effect, and as Kālī-yuga advances, many pseudo religious principles will certainly be introduced, and people will forget the real religious principles enunciated by Lord Kṛṣṇa before the beginning of Kālī-yuga, namely principles of surrender unto the lotus feet of the Lord.” (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 2, 78)

<sup>40</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 277.

<sup>41</sup> “Therefore, the principles of *dharma*, or religion, are the direct orders of the

Supreme Personality of Godhead...the highest principle of religion is to surrender unto Him only, and nothing more." (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 2.27). In another place, "Actually the only religion is the religion of surrender unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We must serve the Lord in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 4, Part 2, 438)

<sup>42</sup> This verse, 18.66 from the *Bhagavad-gītā*, wherein Krishna requests the surrender of his devotee, is repeatedly quoted by Prabhupāda as being the final instruction of all religion: "...Kṛṣṇa says, ...'Give up all other duties and surrender unto Me.' That is the last word in religion." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 3, 134).

<sup>43</sup> In the Chapter, "Jesus Christ was a Guru" (*The Science of Self Realization*, 134-6), much of Prabhupāda's view of Jesus Christ is presented. Therein, Prabhupāda implies that Jesus was a Vaishnava. And as quoted earlier in this chapter, Prabhupāda refers to Christianity as a form of Vaishnavism.

<sup>44</sup> See *The Science of Self Realization*, 136.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 135.

<sup>46</sup> In a recorded conversation, Prabhupāda was asked, "I would like to know, though, that when you say 'Kṛṣṇa consciousness,' is there any difference between that and Christ consciousness?" Prabhupāda replied, "No, there is no difference. Christ came to preach the message of God. If you actually become Christ conscious, you become Kṛṣṇa conscious." (*The Science of Self Realization*, 299)

<sup>47</sup> Prabhupāda states that, "Actually, one who is guided by Jesus Christ will certainly get liberation. But it is very hard to find a man who is actually being guided by Jesus Christ." (*Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers*, 94)

<sup>48</sup> See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā Vol. 3, 347; also see letter to Dāsārha, 3-4-72.

<sup>49</sup> See Letter to Suchandra 12-8-69; also see Letter to Dāsārha 3-4-72.

<sup>50</sup> See Letter to Suchandra 12-8-69.

<sup>51</sup> See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, Vol. 3, 348; also, *The Matchless Gift*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, Vol. 3, 348; also, Letter to Suchandra, 2-8-69.

<sup>53</sup> See *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 2, Part 1, 208; *The Science of Self Realization*, 135.

<sup>54</sup> "It doesn't matter which set of religious principles one follows; the only injunction is that he must follow them strictly....However, even if one takes up a different system of religion, according to this verse he must follow the religious principles he has accepted. Whether one is a Hindu, or a Mohammedan or a Christian, he should follow his own religious principles." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 5, Part 2, 449-50)

<sup>55</sup> *The Matchless Gift*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> "Prahlaḍa Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with

sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words)—these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge." (*Bhāgavatam*, verses 7.5.23-4)

57 "Please hear the transcendental pastimes of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu with faith and devotion. Giving up envy of the Lord, everyone chant the Lord's holy name, Hari." (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā 9.361)

Prabhupāda states that "if one actually wants to become religious, he must take up the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*." (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā 4, 262).

These are examples of very exclusivistic statements; but these must be seen in light of all the other statements on the universal process of chanting the holy names of God, as shall be seen below.

58 *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 2, Part 1, 20.

59 *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 1, Part 1, 7.

60 These four "regulative principles," or "principles of religion" are discussed in many places throughout Prabhupāda's writings. Prabhupāda writes, "The principles of religion, namely *austerity, cleanliness, mercy, and truthfulness*, as we have already discussed, may be followed by the follower of any faith. There is no need to turn from Hindu to Mohammedan to Christian or some other faith and thus become a renegade and not follow the principles of religion. The *Bhāgavatam* religion urges following the *principles of religion*. The principles of religion are not the dogmas or regulative principles of a certain faith. Such regulative principles may be different in terms of the time and place concerned. One has to see whether the aims of religion have been achieved." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 1, Part 3, 273)

Prabhupāda also writes, "Irreligious persons are like animals, but in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement such persons can come to a sense of understanding things as they are and abandon the four principles of prohibited activities—namely illicit sex life, meat eating, gambling and intoxication. This is the beginning of religious life. Those who are so-called religious and indulge in these four principles of prohibited activities are pseudo-religionists. Religious life and sinful activity cannot parallel one another." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 4, Part 4, 98)

61 Some relevant passages on animal slaughter in religion are the following: *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 4, Part 4, 83, 142.

62 Prabhupāda states that, "one cannot continue killing animals and at the same time be a religious man." (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 2, p. 167) In this connection, Prabhupāda describes the purpose of the Buddha's mission as the ending of animal killing in the name of religion (*Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, Part 2, 167; Canto 4, Part

- 4, 142-3; and Canto 4, Part 2, 448).
- <sup>63</sup> See *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 3, Part 2, 17; Canto 4, Part 4, 83, 143-4; Canto 8, Part 1, 305.
- <sup>64</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 9.1.
- <sup>65</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 11.1.
- <sup>66</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 18.68.
- <sup>67</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 18.67.
- <sup>68</sup> These two meanings for "godhead" were given in the Oxford English Dictionary.
- <sup>69</sup> The five *rasas*, or experiences in the divine relationship with God, are discussed in various places throughout Prabhupāda's writings. For a brief discussion, see the introduction to the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* (page 5). More elaborate discussions can be found in the *Nectar of Devotion*, and *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. In these various presentations of *rasa* throughout Prabhupāda's writings, they are presented either in a progressive hierarchical arrangement, as steps toward the topmost *rasa* of *mādhurya*, or they are presented as five unique perfectional levels or goals. Thus even within the school itself there are diverse realizations allowed indicated by these different stages of *bhakti*.
- <sup>70</sup> *Kṛṣṇa: The Supreme Personality of Godhead*, Vol 1, 189.
- <sup>71</sup> *Bhāgavatam*, 3.4.19 purport.
- <sup>72</sup> *Bhāgavatam*, 1.1.2 purport.
- <sup>73</sup> *Bhāgavatam*, 1.1.3 purport.
- <sup>74</sup> *Bhāgavatam*, 2.9.37 purport.
- <sup>75</sup> *Bhāgavatam*, 7.6.27 purport.
- <sup>76</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā* 6.30.20-21.
- <sup>77</sup> *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā 19.155 purport.
- <sup>78</sup> See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā Chapter 8, especially verses 160-193.
- <sup>79</sup> *Teachings of Lord Kapila*, vs. 29 purport.
- <sup>80</sup> *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, with translation and commentary by A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, Introduction in Canto One (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedānta Book Trust, [1987] 1993), 40.
- <sup>81</sup> *Bhāgavatam*, Canto 2, Part 2, 111.
- <sup>82</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 166.
- <sup>83</sup> Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 97.
- <sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 96-97.
- <sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 97.



## THE EDUCATION OF HUMAN EMOTIONS

### Śrīla Prabhupāda as Spiritual Educator

Klaus K. Klostermaier

I cannot recall the exact day in late 1962 when I met Swami Bhaktivedanta for the first time, but I distinctly remember the place. Swami Bon Maharaj, the Rector of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy in Vrindaban, U.P., called me to his office to introduce his *gurubhai* and to tell him about my background and my position at the Institute. I was then around thirty and Swami Bhaktivedanta appeared to me a venerable senior *sadhu* who was spending the eve of his life in Krishna's Holy City, like so many others. Since my own office was adjacent to Swami Bon's, whenever he came to visit his *gurubhai*, Swami Bhaktivedanta would stop by for a chat. He told me about his personal background and about his project to translate the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* into English in a multi-volume high-quality edition. The first volume was ready and I admired the beautiful production, which by then was exceptional in Indian publishing. He undertook many trips to Delhi to meet with his publishers and he invited me several times to his modest quarters in Dāmodar Mandir. In my diary I noted on May 10, 1964 that Swami Bhaktivedanta had shown me the second volume of his *Bhāgavatam* translation.

We somehow came to talk about the Rāma Rājya Pariṣad, with which he seemed to sympathize. He told me that he wanted to see God established as "perfect dictator." He abhorred Communism because of its atheistic ideology. I do not know whether he talked with Swami Bon about his intended mission to America—I cannot recall that he ever mentioned it to me. Swami Bon commented in my presence on the impossibility of raising enough

funds for the planned *Bhāgavatam* edition—he certainly spoke out of experience, since he had time and again attempted to elicit donations from friends and well-wishers to keep his institute going.

Swami Bon Maharaj had himself been a missionary of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in India and abroad. He often reminisced about the exhibition he had organized in Madras and the extended trips he had undertaken to England, Germany, America, Japan and Burma to found centers and to preach the message of Caitanya. Swami Bon was a powerful speaker and he had a good singing voice. Much of his biography is contained in several contributions to a 1955 publication *Swami Bon Maharaj*, edited by Shri Tamālkrishna Dās at the occasion of Swami Bon's 55th birthday.<sup>1</sup> There also is a poetic autobiographical booklet, *The Search*.<sup>2</sup> In another autobiographical booklet, entitled, *The Founder of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy*,<sup>3</sup> he enumerates all the places he visited and in which he gave lectures.

While Swami Bon Maharaj largely tried to imitate Western intellectual approaches to religion, expecting in the process to convince Westerners of the superiority of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, Swami Bhaktivedanta, probably without being overtly conscious of it, stayed firmly within practical Indian traditional religiosity and thus helped to focus the contemporary Western search for emotional fulfillment. To do this, he drew on the living resources of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, utilizing emotions as instruments to reach personal fulfillment. For those who were wildly experimenting with consciousness-changing drugs inducing short-lived chemically-produced "highs," he offered a systematic teaching on emotions and a beautiful liturgy to reach a "transcendental high," to "stay high forever" and to become permanently "God-conscious."

A recent issue of *TIME* magazine carried a feature article which suggested to use an "EQ" instead of an "IQ" as measure of a person's true worth.<sup>4</sup> The "E" stands for "Emotion" (especially the control of emotions and emotional maturity). Slowly the ancient wisdom is dawning also in modern psychology that emotions, far from being irrelevant and marginal in a person's life, are central and of utmost importance. Emotions can no longer be dismissed as but "vague," "subjective," "fleeting" states of mind without relevance for the "real world." Western mainstream religions throughout the past few centuries had tried to rationalize their traditions, to repress emotions and to conduct services like business meetings. Swami Bhaktivedanta went against this whole notion of a religion reduced to unemotional moralizing and pragmatic fund-collecting for good causes. He preached a religion that was

not afraid of emotions. His religion was full-blooded and demanded full engagement of the whole person.

He wanted to mold people according to his own ideal of a God-centered life, and an astonishing number responded. While it emerged in the years to come that full commitment did not mean the same for all, it did include for all mind and body, thoughts and feelings, rituals and emotions. Krishna as the *akhila rasāmṛta mūrti* demands a response from all human faculties—and that is what Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is all about. While the importance of the emotional dimension in religion had certainly to be argued in the context of mainstream modern Western notions of religion, it has surprisingly also recently become a major issue in India, as Krishna Caitanya's *The Betrayal of Krishna* shows.

### Does Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism betray Krishna?

Krishna Caitanya's provocative *The Betrayal of Krishna* raises many fundamental issues with regard to Hinduism as a whole as well as to many of its *sampradāyas*.<sup>5</sup> The larger concern—not to be taken up here—is the assumption of an original, normative Krishna religion, a “fundamental” Hinduism, from which later developments strayed. The more limited issue that will be addressed is the characterisation of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism (Chapter XII) as one of the lamentable perversions of an originally austere religion under the influence of eroticism gone wild.<sup>6</sup> He correctly points out that Bengal Vaiṣṇava literature is enthusiastic to the point of sounding orgiastic. He mentions terms like *divonmāda*, *premonada*, *preme pāgal*, all of which designate states of “madness” as seen from the standpoint of the average law-abiding citizen. He contrasts this state of mind with his conviction that “profound sobriety is needed for true religious experience both for a deep musing on the design of existence and for accepting imperatives for oneself in the light of that design.” (449) He also complains about the “noise, literally and metaphorically,” which that kind of religion creates, and refers to historic instances of bans imposed on *nāgara kīrtans* by the civil authorities.

What Krishna Caitanya says is true—of a great many people, but not of all. There are, apparently, people who are extrovert, gregarious, noise-loving, also in religion. However much one might personally prefer to meditate and quietly reflect on the meaning of life, one has to realize that the majority of our contemporaries have other preferences. Should they be shut out from religion? India is famous for showing a great tolerance for

differences in religion, allowing a great variety of religions to co-exist side by side.

From the standpoint of a tradition like Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, one could also question the validity of the statement that "profound sobriety" is the most suitable mood for religion to develop in. Why not exuberance, enthusiasm, intoxication? From the standpoint of the *divonmāda* the "deep musing on the design of existence" may be a very inadequate response to the revelation of the divine perceived as life, love and bliss. We obviously have a dilemma we cannot solve to everybody's satisfaction. Historically, also in India, ecstatic praise and festive abandon may have preceded quiet reflection and meditation as "religion." It is a more likely source of community-bonding and foundation of organised religious activity.

No doubt, Krishna Caitanya is right to point out the ever-present danger of debasing religion. However, religion can be and has been debased in more than one way. While emotions may have gone wrong many times in the context of religion, so has reason: the meticulously planned elimination of dissenters, the deadening formalisation of rituals and beliefs, the ice-cold logic of inquisitors, are as much a violation of the true spirit of religion as debauchery and abandon are. In short, no case can be made against Bengal Vaiṣṇavism on the grounds that its basis is aesthetics rather than rational metaphysics, and one would have to judge it by standards other than those of a probably unduly rationalised "original" austere Krishna religion, as Krishna Caitanya seems to see it.

While disagreeing with Krishna Caitanya on some of the evaluations of developments within the *bhakti* tradition, I nevertheless welcome his attitude of honest self-criticism concerning Indian culture as a whole. "We have," he says in one place, "along with some of the loftiest perceptions of mankind, some of the most misguided philosophising too in our tradition..." (469) I also agree with him when he says that "we are lost if we do not recognize that there is a lot of tripe in our tradition masquerading as lofty philosophy and reject it outright" (470).

Krishna Caitanya emphasises the "pathological excitability" of the founder of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism evidenced by his going into a trance at the sight of a peacock and imagining himself in the presence of Krishna at the sound of a flute. Founders of religions often carry features that are "abnormal" and whose imitation by a large number of followers would create the impression of mental disorder. Nobody who accepts Buddha as ideal would try to imitate his years of extreme penances that preceded his enlighten-

ment. The average Christian would not think it necessary to literally die on a cross in order to qualify as follower of Jesus. And Muslims are not expected to either parallel the prophetic gift of Mohammed or to imitate each of his actions in real life. Gauḍiyya Vaiṣṇavas, as we know, were able to found viable communities and to lead humanly fulfilling lives. Their enthusiastic love for Krishna has made them accomplish much by way of building temples, celebrating feasts and creating a rich literature that bespeaks their emotionalism but is otherwise not reprehensible. The emotional, enthusiastic, “noisy” Krishna-*bhakti* that Prabhupāda brought to the West is not a betrayal of Krishna but a development of the ancient tradition which is suitable for our time.

### **The need to acknowledge the importance of emotions**

Centuries of rationalism that have shaped the modern West have lead to an atrophy of emotions in the official representatives of our culture on the one hand and a total debasement of popular culture on the other hand, where emotions were allowed to deteriorate into animal instincts unbridled by any human disciplines. Science, which dominated intellectual life for the past several generations, eliminated on principle everything that was not “fact” and that did not follow the logic of its own rationality. Erwin Schrödinger, a Nobel prize winning physicist once remarked, that “science is ghastly silent about all and sundry that is really near to our heart, that really matters to us. It cannot tell us about red and blue, bitter and sweet, beautiful and ugly, good or bad, God and eternity. Science sometimes pretends to answer questions in these domains, but the answers are often so silly that we are not inclined to take them seriously.”<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, if we continue considering red and blue, bitter and sweet, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, God and eternity, important “real” life issues, we need approaches other than rationality and science. Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is one such approach that seems to have worked for fairly large groups of people who were able to realize God the Beautiful. Platonic tradition too recognizes beauty as an essential aspect of reality, on a level with truth and goodness. The only way to perceive beauty is through feelings, not through rationality. Ideally, the sense of beauty would be integrated into a perception of good and a vision of truth. In reality the balance is usually imperfect and one of these areas is more pronounced to the detriment of the others. Each age has its typical blind-spot as well. An overly rationalist age shows a deficiency in wisdom and sensibility. An overemphasis on senti-

ment will result in an under-emphasis on practical reason and ethical consideration.

The "theologising" of the *rasas* is comparable to the "humanising" of animal drives: while humans eat, drink and mate, as animals do, in humans these functions become "humane," i.e., means of expressing something higher than satisfaction of physical needs (the symbolism of the "Last Supper" or of the "Symposium" goes far beyond calorie-intake and metabolism). Similarly, while love, anger and fear are universal, "secular" human emotions, in a religious convert they are expressions of transcendent experience (the symbolism of intra-divine love and of the "night of the soul" again far transcends suggestions of sexual union or dread of darkness).

Śrī Caitanya might not have succeeded in any other age than the one in which he actually lived. Similarly, the Hare Krishna Movement probably needed exactly the circumstances which Swami Bhaktivedānta found in the New York of the late Sixties to develop. Earlier attempts somewhere else to win followers did not succeed. Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is a response to the needs of a particular time and place—other times and other places may demand other responses. But the indisputable fact is that emotions can not be suppressed forever and eliminated in the process of creating a human civilisation.

The suspicion towards emotions, as representing rationality gone somewhere wrong, is endemic in mainstream Western culture. It is shared even by its declared rebels and dissenters. Take Jean Paul Sartre, who had this to say: "It is constitutive for an emotion that it ascribes something to an object, that infinitely transcends the object. There really is a 'universe of feelings' ... We should speak of the 'universe of feelings' in the same way as we speak of the 'universe of dreams' or the 'world of insanity'."<sup>8</sup>

Emotions not only have a reality of their own, but also a logic of their own. It would be self-contradictory to attempt to develop a rational theory of emotional culture: experience alone will be the guide to an emotional systematics. The Goswāmīs of the Bengal Vaiṣṇava tradition have provided it in their works, especially Rūpa Goswāmī in his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* and his *Ujjvalanīlamanī*, and Jīva Goswāmī in his commentary *Locanarocanya*. These works come from "insiders," not only in the sense that they belonged to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, but also in the sense that emotions are looked at from inside rather than "objectively." Active participation in, and identification with, the emotions described characterizes this approach.

Recognizing the "secular" scale of emotions established by Indian literary

and artistic tradition as reflecting “real-life emotions,” the Goswāmīs, overpowered by their own experience of ecstatic God-love, inject into it the essence of religiosity. Humans have always identified the ultimate, be it of thought, of power, of virtue, of reality with the divine—the ultimate of experience of blissful emotion is no different. We have to trust the geniuses of emotion in their own field as much as we trust the geniuses of science or the geniuses of literature in their respective domains. Neither is interchangeable or collapsible into something else. In either sphere do we touch something irreducibly human.

### Are emotions antithetical to ethics?

One of the often heard criticisms levelled at Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is that it is lacking an ethic and not able to provide a foundation for it. It is correct to observe that the absence of rational systematics would not allow for any kind of philosophical ethic, nor would the deity as conceived by them be the source of ethical commands along the lines of either the *Dharmaśāstra* or the Biblical decalogue. However, the 64 elements of worship contain an implicit canon of virtues and vices identified with relation to *sevā*, the central concern of this religion. Thus the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* identifies 10 positive precepts for followers of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, paralleled by 10 prohibitions. Furthermore, it mentions 32 offenses against worship. While largely ritualistic, they nevertheless express an “ethic” and shape the behaviour of the devotee. Like other advanced spiritual teachings it appears to presuppose basic ethics rather than inculcate it and to concentrate on the development of higher dimensions of spirituality. In their everyday lives, Bengal Vaiṣṇavas observe the same basic morality as everybody else and, if anything, show a higher sensitivity in interpersonal relationships, due probably to their intense devotional practice. Swami Bhaktivedānta began his mission in New York by committing his disciples to a basic ethic: not to take drugs, not to eat meat, not to indulge in illicit sex and not to gamble.

The point most often highlighted by the opponents of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism throughout the ages is the exaltation of the *parakīya* relationship between Krishna and Rādhā, the divine couple. While there is some difficulty in rationalising that point in their faith, it should be understood that no teacher of that school ever suggested that devotees should imitate this “mystery” on the mundane level. Practices like the ones that were publicised and condemned in the celebrated Maharaja case, involving members

of the Vallabha *sampradāya*, have been perceived as unorthodox and cannot be considered as orthodox in any sense. Śrī Caitanya and his followers have always insisted on the transcendent nature of Krishna *līlā* (in a way parallel to the transcendent nature of inter-trinitarian Father-Son relationship proposed by Christian theologians).

It was the Bengal Vaiṣṇavism that Swami Bhaktivedānta brought to New York in 1966, and not the Advaita Vedānta which Swami Vivekānanda had preached in 1893, that appealed to a generation of Americans that had gotten sick on a diet of drugs and sex.<sup>9</sup> God appeared to the hippies and junkies in the form of Krishna and Rādhā, of Kirtans and Ratha-yātrās, of temple-worship and joyous noises.

### The importance of Śrīla Prabhupāda's contribution

There is a great need today for the specific contribution which Caitanya and his followers made to the culture of their day and age, the education of the senses and the emotions in an artistic as well as a religious sense. Caitanya brought beauty and art to religion and he directed the emotions beyond the merely material objects of enjoyment. To a culture that identified religion uniquely with renunciation, and which condemned all forms of enjoyment as entanglement in *samsāra*, Caitanya announced the message that God was Love, God was Joy, God was Life. To a culture that identified happiness unthinkingly with sense-gratification, self-indulgence and everything that money can buy, Śrīla Prabhupāda preached the transcendental bliss of a God-conscious life. A world in which this God is present in bodily form cannot be all bad, all illusion or entrapment. For Swami Bhaktivedānta it was more important to find God *in* the world than to leave the world in order to find liberation. Instead of writing off the senses merely as doors to hell and to hold sense-objects responsible for all the misery of life, Caitanya (and thus Swami Bhaktivedānta) saw them as doors to heaven and as instruments for spiritual development.

Everything can be exaggerated, and every exaggeration perverts the meaning of an idea or practice. Also emotionalism can be overdone and history has shown that "love" can degenerate, and that depraved minds can read into religious mysteries a meaning that offends all sense of propriety and decency. However, that is the risk that is unavoidably present as soon as we deal with something humanly meaningful. We need checks and controls, both from within and from without, to make sure that an ideal stays



an ideal. Indian literary theory has the principle of *aucitya* ("appropriateness"), which demands that a statement not only fit into the context of the specific work in which it appears but also into the overall culture, and into general human concerns. This principle has to be applied to religion too. Notwithstanding the unchanging nature of the divine in itself, its expression in human terms and its appropriation in a particular culture require an appropriate medium that is capable of conveying the message to a particular audience.

Gauḍiṇya Vaiṣṇavism can be seen as an "escape," no doubt. It arose at a time when the condition of most Hindus in India was just about hopeless and when the majority felt powerless to change anything. In such a situation Caitanya and his associates "escaped" to God—into a religion highly charged with feeling and emotion. It had elements of the basic human instincts in it—it used erotic/sexual imagery, movement and dance that lead to a frenzy, it was noisy and went public. Compared to both the traditional *smārta* way of life and the more contemplative forms of *bhakti* it was disruptive. Its success had to do with the frustrations that people felt and that could not be dealt with by more "proper" ways of behaviour. "Strong stuff" is required in such situations. Today's alienated and disaffected youth could hardly be impressed by calls to duty and examples of meekness as shown by mediaeval Christian saints. In contrast to the emotion-charged pop-culture of today (in which a surprisingly strong religious element can be found too), which quite often leads to acts of violence and vandalism and in general is destructive and resentful, the emotion charged movement initiated by Caitanya led to the creation of a new culture: a whole new town, Vrindāban, owes its (re-)construction and its continued existence to it, with all its artistic temples, images, its *rās-līlās* and its pilgrimages, its poetry and its music. In our own time the enthusiasm created by Śrīla Prabhupāda similarly led to the construction of beautiful temples in many countries of the world, the establishing of new communities and a literary culture of its own: the very opposite of the destructive trend so widespread in our present Western culture.

Gauḍiṇya Vaiṣṇavism arose largely in reaction to the dry "logic-chopping" of the paṇḍits that represented the "official religion." People have a heart and when they remember God they want to worship rather than analyse theological language in order to find personal growth and fulfillment. The emotive/affective part of humans is more basic than the analytic/rational and hardly repressible. Affects and emotions are, on the whole, a truer

guide to right living than mere rational analysis. They also create a more genuine bond both between humans across cultural and linguistic boundaries, and between different species. They provide a more real connection with the universe as a whole than other human faculties.

To point to Western parallels may not be wholly out of place. Plato and the whole Platonic tradition, which had such a pervasive influence on Western culture, strongly emphasized not only "eros" as moving force but placed the "good" as highest being/value, accessible more through the "heart" than the "head." The Platonists and Neo-Platonists, including the Christian ones, taught a "way of the heart" through which humans could see the ultimate. Augustine coined the famous phrase *Ama et fac quod vis*—"Love and do what you want, convinced that love would not go wrong." While the word "love" has been, and continues to be, much misused for all kinds of things, there would be few humans who could not discern the "real thing" from the wrongly labelled ones.<sup>10</sup>

Beauty plays a major role in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Caitanya must have possessed an artistic personality, one that was overwhelmed by a sense of beauty, and one that responded to beauty in a total way. Also, Śrīla Prabhupāda had a highly developed sense of aesthetics. Although virtually penniless, he insisted on making his *Bhāgavatam* publication a thing of beauty. His devotees, although personally committed to leading austere and simple lives, have created palaces for God and do not hesitate to surround the deity with luxury. A person can quite literally be obsessed by beauty, and a response to beauty perceived or imagined has something elementary about it. It cannot be fully rationalized; it cannot be fully controlled and it overrides all other considerations. Beauty is its own justification; it does not require an intellectual or a moral reason to exist. People who pursue beauty often appear somewhat odd to those who are lacking that elementary sense: they do things, or behave in ways, that would be considered irrational, even immoral, by the more sober-minded. Caitanya and his close followers apparently belonged to this group of people. It is hard to judge them from any "ordinary" standard. They appeared crazy to some of their contemporaries; they made noise, they disturbed the peace of ordinary citizens, they used a language that offended the moral sensibilities of many. They were quite literally *divyonmāda*, crazy about god, in a way that went far beyond the normal *bhakti* tradition.

### Concluding remarks

The materialism, consumerism, and hedonism of many of our contemporaries is an incontrovertible fact, and to negatively contrast our age with that of a more restrained, disciplined, austere character will not do much good. Austerity in itself is not necessarily a virtue and poverty as such is not necessarily desirable. Nor is enjoyment of life a vice, or being happy a sign of lacking religiosity. If, as theistic religions East and West maintain, everything is either a creation or an emanation of the Deity, then everything must have a divine dimension, and everything must be able to serve as an instrument to reach God. This must be especially true of central human realities and experiences, such as feelings and emotions.

The tenderness with which Gauḍiṣya Vaiṣṇavas meet their God often translates into great compassion and friendliness towards humans and animals. The focusing of all the powers of heart and soul on the embodiment of love should make them forget the petty quarrels and jealousies that normally fill the days of people whose focus in life is their own dear self and its comforts. Caitanya's symphony of feelings performed by religious artists like Śrīla Prabhupāda may, like Mozart's music, belong to a very different age, an age that is irretrievably gone. But, like Mozart's music again, while inimitable and unique as far as the origin and setting goes, it still is capable of stirring human hearts and minds in our age and time. It may not solve any of our mundane problems, but it transposes those able to perceive it, into a world of joy and meaning.

### ENDNOTES

1. V.T. University, Vrindavan, U.P.
2. Published by the author, Vrindavan, 1945.
3. Vrindavan, n.d. (1967)
4. October, 1995.
5. Krishna Chaitanya, *The Betrayal of Krishna: Vicissitudes of a Great Myth* (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1991).
6. A thorough rebuttal of many points made by Krishna Chaitanya can be found in David Haberman, "Divine Betrayal: Krishna-Gopāl of Braj in the Eyes of Outsiders," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1: 83-111.
7. Erwin Schödinger, *My View of the World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 65.
8. J. P. Sartre, *Esquisse d'une theorie des emotions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 63.

9. See Larry Shinn, "The Maturation of the Hare Krishnas in America," in *ISKCON Communications Journal*, No. 3 (January-June 1994), pp. 25-36.

10. See my "Hṛdayavidya" in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9/4 (1972), pp. 744-750.

## CHURNING THE GLOBAL OCEAN OF NECTAR: THE DEVOTIONAL MUSIC OF ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA

Guy L. Beck

"I have talked to a couple of musicians about it, and we agreed that in his head this Swami must have had hundreds and hundreds of melodies that had been brought back from the real learning from the other side of the world." —Irving Halpern, quoted in *Śrīla Prabhupāda Līlāmṛta*, vol. 2, p. 209, by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswāmī (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1980).

The matchless spiritual gifts brought from India to America by Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda in 1965 included among other things an extraordinary type of religious and devotional music, one that had never been brought before by anyone, not even Swami Vivekānanda (1893) or Paramahansa Yogānanda (1920). Based on traditional Indian forms, Śrīla Prabhupāda's musical *kīrtans* reached out and touched the hearts of all who came within its scope. Even the poet Allen Ginsberg, who had already been to India and heard Hare Krishna chanting there, was so amazed at Śrīla Prabhupāda's command of devotional music that he presented Prabhupāda's new movement with its first harmonium.

The Bhakti traditions of India have generally embraced the art of music as the most effective method of presenting and transmitting the mood or *rasa* of divine love of God. Nearly all of the great Bhakti saints were either composers of songs, singers of great renown, or else supporters of devotional music—the list includes the founders of the great Vaiṣṇava Sampradāyas: Śrī Rāmānujācārya, Śrī Madhvācārya, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrī Valabhācārya, Śrī Nimbārkācārya, Śrī Hit Harivaṁś, Swami Haridās, Śaṅkaradev, and so on. The traditional founders of the two main branches of Indian classical music, Swami Haridās and Tansen of North Indian Hindustani, and Purandara Dāsa and Tyāgarāja of South Indian Carnatic, were devout

Vaiṣṇavas who propagated a devotional message through the medium of song. However, although Indian instrumental music has been heard in the West, the vocal music of these Bhakti traditions has remained largely unknown and unappreciated due to cultural barriers. However, thanks to the efforts of Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, these barriers have been crossed, and a pure and authoritative representation of it is now accessible worldwide.

This essay, with reference to his principal recordings, seeks to bring about a deeper appreciation and understanding of the musical side of Śrīla Prabhupāda by discussing his unique knowledge and use of musical techniques in terms of established traditions of Vaiṣṇava devotional music. Even without his other important accomplishments, we can claim that Śrīla Prabhupāda has achieved a firm place within the Bhakti tradition solely on the merit of his contribution to Vaiṣṇava music. In short, his music stands on its own.

It is indeed an honor to participate in the birth-centennial of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Although I have formally studied Indian classical music and Bengali *kīrtan* in India for many years, it seemed presumptuous of me to attempt a musicological study of music that is *alaukik*, transcendental, and said to have emanated from the spiritual sky. Thus I felt both joy and trepidation in undertaking what can only be an academic assessment of the music of Śrīla Prabhupāda, running the risk of underestimating its deeper value and impact. Nonetheless, this task presented itself as both a challenge and an opportunity to provide a clearer understanding of a phenomenon that is extremely dear to the hearts of many disciples and devotees, and at the same time create greater exposure. This venture is no doubt mirrored by many other religious studies scholars and musicologists who have confronted the challenge of evaluating and interpreting the teachings and music of spiritually gifted persons in a variety of cultures.

In the West, music has had an ambivalent position with regard to religion—a neutral, secular (or sometimes pagan) art that could be adopted for either good or evil, utilized as hymns of angels or ditties of Satan. In Hinduism, on the other hand, where music was created by the gods (Brahmā) and thus possessed of sacred qualities from the beginning, the religious use of music is more readily understood and expected, since it does, after-all, reflect in essence the divine realm. There is almost no distrust here of music qua music.

In the early biography of Śrīla Prabhupāda we find more references testifying to his love of *kīrtan* and devotional music than to his serious study of

it. The earliest evidence of musical training is found in the *Śrīla Prabhupāda Lilāmṛta* (1980; v. 1, p. 8, henceforth SPL), wherein the young Abhay Charan De's (Śrīla Prabhupāda's) father, Gour Mohan De, arranged for a *mṛdaṅga* (clay drum) teacher to train his son in *kīrtan*: "From the beginning of Abhay's life, Gour Mohan had introduced his plan. He had hired a professional *mṛdaṅga* player to teach Abhay the standard rhythms for accompanying *kīrtan*....Gour Mohan had his dream of a son who would grow up singing *bhajan*s, playing *mṛdaṅga*, and speaking on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. When Abhay sat to play the *mṛdaṅga*, even with his left and right arms extended as far as he could, his small hands could barely reach the drumheads at the opposite ends of the drum. With his right wrist he would flick his hand just as his teacher instructed, and his fingers would make a high-pitched sound—*tee nee tee nee taru*—and then he would strike the left drumhead with his open left hand—*boom boom*."

The name and credentials of the above music teacher are not provided. Moreover, there is no further mention of formal training in either classical music or Bengali *kīrtan* singing. And since his early association with the Gauḍīya Maṭh was mainly as a householder living on the outside, he most likely missed certain aspects of the daily ashram 'grind,' wherein participation in *kīrtan* was near compulsory. But according to SPL (v. 1, p. 100), whenever Śrīdhara Mahārāj, one of his godbrothers, would go on preaching programs, Abhay would play *mṛdaṅga*; and whenever Śrīdhara Mahārāj was ill, Abhay would fill-in by performing the *kīrtan* himself and lecturing on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Despite the meager training in music according to the biography, one must conclude that, apart from divine guidance, Śrīla Prabhupāda had an exceptional ear for picking up tunes and melodies, rhythms, musical styles, and vocal intonation throughout his life, whether in Bengal, Allahabad, Delhi, Bombay, Jhansi, or Vrindaban, the hometown of most of the genres of devotional *bhajan* and *kīrtan* prevalent in North India.

Befitting the qualities of saintliness, Śrīla Prabhupāda was never eager for publicity merely as a musician or performer. He was a messenger of the medieval saint Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, whose spiritual lineage was known to decry musical virtuosity for its own sake. As such, Śrīla Prabhupāda did not record his own singing before he left India for America in 1965. Even after landing in New York, the recordings of his sublime chanting and *kīrtan* were made at the instigation and request of Western disciples and admirers. And up until the end of his life, he would usually just

start singing and playing the harmonium due to his own inspiration, regardless if anyone was on hand with a recorder or not. Fortunately, they were on most occasions. In fact, most of the remaining recordings were made in a kind of ad hoc manner, which explains some of the ensuing confusion over dates and names of accompanying musicians. According to Eknāth Dās of the Bhaktivedanta Archives, "the entire music archive is in a state of disarray with only very rough approximations for the many recordings done by Śrīla Prabhupāda, and as yet has not been completely sorted out." But we do know that all of his recordings were made during the ten years between 1966-1976, beginning with the first album in New York in 1966, and ending with recordings made in Vrindaban in 1976, according to Hari Sauri, Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal servant. Many of the best recordings spanning this period comprise the series of 14 compact discs released between 1990-1993 by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

For Śrīla Prabhupāda, music was without doubt important, as it was for all the great Bhakti saint-musicians, but only as part of a broader purpose and outreach, namely, to communicate the moods and experiences of Bhakti. Thus, his music was always intimately connected with his extraordinary state-of-mind, namely total God-consciousness. With these ideas in place, we may now attempt to survey his music in the context of Indian music with reference to selected recordings.

The recording of the first long-playing album (1966), the "Happening Album," in New York by Śrīla Prabhupāda is described in the SPL v. 2, pp. 253-259. The instrumentation did not yet include the traditional *mṛdaṅga* (khole), but rather a two-headed Indian drum, probably a *dholak*, that was played by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Brahmānanda Swāmī has related the story that a boy had brought the drum to the temple the day before the recording, and that he required some persuasion to allow it to be used in the recording the next day. When Śrīla Prabhupāda first picked up the drum, the devotees were ecstatic to see "Swamiji," as they then referred to him, playing so fervently and so well. Rūpānuga Dās played a pair of brass Indian bells, Kīrtanānanda played the tamboura, and Ravindra Svarūp (not the present Ravindra Svarūpa Dāsa) played the drone on the harmonium (given by Ginsberg) by holding down two notes, the tonic and the fifth, with the right hand and pumping the bellows with the left. Two pairs of *kartals* and rhythm sticks were also played. After a few minor adjustments, things got under way: "The first sound was the tamboura, with its plucked, reverberating twang. An instant later Swamiji began beating the drum and singing,



*Vande 'ham śrī-guroḥ...* Then the whole ensemble put out to sea—the tamboura, the harmonium, the clackers, the cymbals, Rūpānuga's bells, Swamiji's solo singing—pushing off from their moorings, out into a fair-weather sea of chanting.... Swamiji's voice in the studio was very sweet.... The instruments were all right, the drum, the singing. The harmony was rough. But this was a special record—a happening. The Hare Krishna Chanters were doing their thing, and they were doing it all right. Alan Kallman was excited. Here was an authentic sound. Maybe it would sell." This was the album which would inspire (then-Beatle) George Harrison to meet and assist the London devotees, according to SPL (1982; v. 4, p. 28).

The second principal recording was made in San Francisco (1967-8) and contained one selection that drew upon classical styles of exposition. The 'Prayers to the Six Goswāmīs' is a traditional Sanskrit *stotra* written by Śrīnivāsācārya, a great saint in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava line. The original recording was made with Śrīla Prabhupāda singing and playing the *kartals* himself. George Ruckert, a sarod student of Ali Akbar Khan, played the sarod on the final recording. George Harrison, who had previously been a regular guest at the New York temple *kīrtans*, related some of his impressions to me in a recent interview (10-21-95): "I used to attend the temple program every Tuesday evening at the storefront. Swamiji would talk on *Bhagavad-Gītā*, chant Hare Krishna, and then cut up an apple and pass it around to all the guests. It was the sweetest apple I ever tasted. He was a very sweet person. I brought a small drum to the *kīrtans*, as Swamiji always encouraged everyone to play any instrument that they could play. He never told anyone not to play due to incompetence. He just would not do that."

According to Ruckert, several devotees approached Ali Akbar Khan in San Francisco and originally requested him to perform on the finished recording of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Khan Sahib declined but asked George if he wanted to do it, since he was considered the maestro's best pupil: "I was delighted to give something back to the nice Swamiji I had known from the New York temple." George then proceeded to dub over Śrīla Prabhupāda's original rendering with the sarod, creating a very evocative mood based on classical *rāgas*. The sarod begins with a short *ālāp*, introducing the mood of the *rāga*, a *rāga* that George had earlier identified in a conversation (10-1-95) as a form of Mīśra Kirwani (or Sindhu Bhairavī)—*sa re ga ma pa dha dha ni ni sa*. This is followed by *kartals* and the singing of the Sanskrit verses by Śrīla Prabhupāda in a strong, bold, but none-the-less melodic voice.<sup>1</sup> Half-way through the piece, George, along with his wife Ann who played tanpu-

ra, had to re-tune the instruments a half-step higher as the music seemed to move up a key. Adjustments were made by fading-out and fading-in the music. The overall mood of the piece, with its flatted third, flatted and natural sixth, and flatted seventh, is one of deep pathos, gravity, and compassion, similar to effects created by certain minor scales in Western music.

Śrīla Prabhupāda produced comparable 'minor-key' effects in the early recordings of 'Hari Haraye Namaḥ' (1968, Bengali) and 'Śikṣāṣṭakam' (1968, Sanskrit), both of which have flatted thirds and sixths and belong to the *rāga* classification known as Āsāvārī Ṭhāt. *Rāgas* of this mode (Ṭhāt) generally express very serious moods evoking gravity and profound spiritual thought, and are more characteristic of Śrīla Prabhupāda's earlier recordings. 'Prayers of King Kulaśekhara' are sung in *rāga* Bhairavī, a similarly serious *rāga* containing flatted second, sixth, and seventh notes. In the Sanskrit prayers of 'Brahma-Saṁhitā,' which he recorded more than any other single item (four times) except for the 'Mahāmantra' and 'Guru prayers,' he varies his renderings through the use of *rāgas* like Vrindāvanī Sārang, Yaman, and Dhanāśrī.

According to Yamunā Devī (conversation 10-29-95), Śrīla Prabhupāda sang what she called 'minor melodies' and 'major melodies,' but no one knew why he chose one or the other at any specific time other than to vary the tune. Gradually there came the concept of a morning melody in a major scale (*sa re ga ma pa dha ni sa*) and an afternoon melody in a minor-like scale, similar to Bhairavī with a touch of Bhairav—*sa re ga ma pa dha ni* (or *ni*) *sa*. However, in Indian classical tradition Bhairav or Bhairavī should be sung in the early morning, especially Bhairav during the Brahmā-Muhūrta hours of 3-6 AM, before sunrise. This apparent contradiction does not seem to have been questioned during Prabhupāda's lifetime. However, the use of a major scale like Vilāval is appropriate in India for morning darśana from about 6-8 AM.

With few exceptions, it seems as if Śrīla Prabhupāda preferred the classical *rāga* moods in his renditions of the Sanskrit *stotras*, as opposed to the Bengali songs that mostly followed lighter tunes adopted from Bengali *kīrtan*. Throughout the Sanskrit prayers sung according to *rāga*-motifs, the over-all production was highly intense and solemn, as if his entire self were behind every note. This squares with the general observation with regard to his singing found in the SPL, v. 2, p. 210: "Although his demeanor was pleasant, his chanting was intensive, sometimes straining, and everything about him was concentration."

The recordings made in 1972 and after were less somber, almost as if he was relieved from the deeper profundity of the earlier moods, and used more *rāga* scales containing major thirds and sevenths. Examples of this are found in 'Daśāvatāra Stotra,' 'Āmār Jivana,' 'Gaurāṅgera Duṭi Pada,' 'Parama Karuṇā,' and the second 'Hari Haraye Namaḥ.'

The 1974 recording made in Germany, *Krishna Meditations*, succeeds by reflecting a highly positive mood, one that rejoices in God's bounty, and celebrates a movement that has grown way beyond all expectations. The melodies are mostly all in major scale idioms, different from the more sober and pensive minor key renderings of earlier times. In fact, two of the songs are major-key reworkings of previous minor-key recordings: 'Prayers to the Six Goswāmīs' and 'Śrī Krishna Caitanya Prabhu.' In addition, the previous minor mode renditions of 'Hari Haraye Namaḥ' and 'Brahma-Saṁhitā' were remade in major scales by 1972.

The rhythm found in Śrīla Prabhupāda's music is perhaps the only fixed variable. Throughout twelve years of preaching and recording, he focused primarily on one *tāla*—Dās Pāḥiṛā (comparable to 4/4 in Western time)—as the basis for nearly all of his songs. Dās Pāḥiṛā is the most common beat found in Bengali *kīrtan*, and is divided as follows into 16 beats: *jhe ne ta - , te ne ta - , khi tete dha ghi, ge da ge da*. The *kartals*, or accompanying hand cymbals, generally follow the downbeat, \* - \*, \* - \*, \* - \*, \* - \* in Dās Pāḥiṛā. Another simple rhythm of Bengali *kīrtan* is Lophā. Resembling a waltz time in 3/4, and comparable to the six-beat Dādrā of Hindustani tradition, it is composed of 12 beats as follows: *ja ge ja, ja ghe na, ta ke ta, ta khe ta*, with the *kartal* playing \* - \*, \* - \*, \* - \*, \* - \*. While almost never recorded by Śrīla Prabhupāda, this rhythm was introduced to ISKCON and popularized by his disciple Acyutānanda Swāmī through recordings made in 1972. It is still used by devotees when singing certain Bengali songs of Śrīla Bhaktinoda or Narottam Dās.

Indian *tālas*, found in both classical music and in Bengali *kīrtan*, prove to be very complex with rhythms comprising any number of beat-cycles. Bengali *kīrtan tālas* such as Teoṭ, Dui Ṭhukī, Daś Kusī, Choṭa Daś Kusī, Baṛa Daś Kusī, and Sam Tāl, containing up to 64 beats in a cycle, are extremely complex and require accomplished musicians as well as audiences to make them effective. If Śrīla Prabhupāda had employed these beats, his music would have been totally incomprehensible to Westerners and many Indians as well. So the genius of Śrīla Prabhupāda is witnessed in his limitation of rhythms to one, so that while the melodic structure may vary widely through

the free use of classical *rāgas* and Bengali *kīrtan* melodies, the steady rhythm maintains a fixed identity-point for the devotees and listening audiences.

In three of the Bengali songs of the early seventies, Śrīla Prabhupāda introduced special phrases characteristic of Bengali *kīrtan* style known as *ākharas*, short repetitions containing inner or “spontaneous” meanings of the text which are either learned from a teacher or else created on the spot by the singer. ‘Hari Hari Vipphale’ (Śrīla Prabhupāda’s favorite Bengali *kīrtan* song, according to SPL, v. 4, p. 48), ‘Vibhāvarī Śeṣa,’ and ‘Nitāi Pada Kamala’ all contain short excursions into *ākharā* creation. But this is observed only in regard to the typical tune found in traditional *ākharā*, which he applies to a line from the original text of the poet. In ‘Hari Hari Vipphale,’ the line “*jāniyā śuniyā biṣa khāinu*” is repeated as if it were an independent *ākharā* phrase. In ‘Vibhāvarī Śeṣa,’ the line from the last stanza, “*jamunā-jīvana, keli-parāyaṇa*” is fondly repeated three times in the lower register according to the style of *ākharā*. In ‘Nitāi Pada Kamala,’ the words, “*vidyā-kule ki koribe*” are similarly sung in *ākharā* style. The performance of *ākharas* often requires a change in the tempo or sometimes even the rhythm itself (from Dās Pāhiṛā to Lophā, for example), but unfortunately none of the devotee-musicians accompanying Śrīla Prabhupāda in the West were prepared to do that, despite Prabhupāda’s indications for speeding-up or slowing-down by sometimes tapping the harmonium notes in succession.

In general, *ākharas* are composed of several, usually three or four, additional lines of lyrics that are sung a few times in repetition, after which there is a return to the original text of the song. These lines are not in the original song-text, but are taught to singers by experienced *kīrtanīyas* (songsters), or even created impromptu by very advanced singer-composers. Though there is no evidence of Śrīla Prabhupāda creating his own *ākharā* lyric as in the style of the *kīrtan* singers in Bengal, he used the typical *ākharā* melody to give added flavor to his pensive renditions of these classic songs, and by doing that, exposed fresh audiences to the genre of *kīrtan*-singing in a pleasing manner without overwhelming them with the full tradition.

According to the early disciple Mukunda Goswāmī (conversation 12-2-95), Śrīla Prabhupāda had used and consulted a personally handwritten song-book when singing and recording the Bengali songs and Sanskrit *stotras*. This would suggest that not all of his material was committed to memory. Unfortunately this book has not been recovered.

The most important song associated with the Hare Krishna Movement is the Hare Krishna chant of sixteen words (32 syllables), the Mahāmantra;

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. As such, the introduction of the movement coincides with the introduction of the chant along with its tune. The most popular melody of this chant is still the one recorded by the London devotees under the sponsorship of George Harrison at Apple Records during the Summer of 1969. This tune has a brief history first in the USA. According to the SPL (v. 4, pp. 31-32), at the time of the Harrison recording a certain melody was already popular among young people in London due to the Broadway musical *Hair*, which had started its run on Broadway in New York on April 29, 1968: "When the first group of devotees arrived in George's Mercedes, a crowd of teenagers began singing Hare Krishna to the tune popularized by the rock musical *Hair*." The tune utilized in *Hair* was borrowed from devotees in New York who had obviously heard Śrīla Prabhupāda's chanting of the Mahāmantra on the Happening Album, if not having heard him sing it regularly at the storefront temple in lower Manhattan.

Hare Krishna chanting figures centrally in the musical *Hair*. According to James Rado (conversation on 10-8-95), one of the writers of the story and lyrics along with Gerome Ragni, the inspiration for the show came from a desire to create something totally new that reflected the social and cultural climate of the younger generation, drawing in whatever was most 'in' around the area of Greenwich Village: "We used to follow the devotees, observe them, and then tried to incorporate this element in the show. With their bells, robes, and chants, they were exciting, complementing perfectly the changing times."

In the final scene of Act One a group of hippies, the Tribe, attend a Be-In in Central Park in order to celebrate love, peace, sex, and drugs: "The Be-In...The sound of bells from offstage, from the back of the theater, from the aisles. Ankle wrist, hand bells. The Tribe enters from all directions with their bells, carrying candles and incense, enveloping the audience, first with the slight, insistent rhythm, moving into 'Hare Krishna,' the rhythms building throughout the scene. A peace-pipe is passed around. Flowers, fruit and raisins, and nuts, given out. Flowers and incense to the audience."<sup>2</sup>

The lyric of the *Hair* chant is the standard Mahāmantra, interspersed with the words, Love, Drop Out, Be In, Beads, Flowers, Freedom, Happiness, Smoke, Smoke, Take Trips, Get High, Laugh Joke and Good-Bye, Love Sex Love Sex, Marijuana, etc.; buzz-words tied to the Hippie generation. The entire scene ends in a mass of confusion in which members dance naked which shocked the audiences. The close association with the Hippie move-

ment as depicted in *Hair* was of course scorned by many of the devotees, creating, as it would, negative stereotypes of Śrīla Prabhupāda, Vaiṣṇavism, and Indian devotional traditions. But according to the writers, no formal complaint was ever made against the Broadway production or persons involved. The writers, as they confessed, meant no harm or deliberate slander, but simply wanted a new and trendy subject to work into the show.

Galt Macdermot, the Canadian composer of the music for *Hair* including "Aquarius," the 'anthem' of the entire '60s pop culture, set the Hare Krishna Mahāmantra to music for the scene entitled "Be-In." In a recent conversation (10-4-95), he said that his melody was based on the tune he had heard the Hare Krishna devotees chanting, being sure it was an authentic one. Galt and the other writers, James Rado and Gerome Ragni, followed the devotees around Manhattan, especially in Greenwich Village, talked with them, and picked up their tune. Then Galt, a composer of popular songs as well as a jazz pianist, very cleverly reworked the melody that he heard using Western harmony. The *Hair* version, though basically faithful to the original melody-line, is in the key of G minor with the chord sequence as follows: C minor, F seventh, B flat, E flat, A minor with flatted fifth, D seventh, and back to G minor.

The 'authentic' tune that Galt and others heard the devotees chanting must have been a variant of the Mahāmantra sung by Śrīla Prabhupāda on the Happening Album, since the melody-line is significantly similar, though Śrīla Prabhupāda performed it, in that version, by beginning on the fifth instead of the fourth (as was the common practice afterwards), and ending on the second instead of the tonic, with the drone remaining on the tonic throughout. But in his later recordings he followed the standard tuning arrangement for Hare Krishna, which leads one to wonder whether the tuning for Hare Krishna on the Happening Album was meant to be that way or not.

The version of "Hare Krishna" recorded and produced by George Harrison of the Beatles at Apple Records followed a simpler chord sequence, according to Western harmony, of F, C, G seventh, and C. The melody was basically the same as the *Hair* tune with slight modification, resolving in a major chord instead of a minor one, and being more faithful to the version of Śrīla Prabhupāda. And since Harrison admittedly had in his possession the Happening Album since the time of its release, he was already familiar with the Prabhupāda tune. Unlike the previous two versions, however, the vocalists here attempted to sing in harmony on this recording that ultimately hit the top of the charts in England and around the world: "In the

Summer of 1969, just before the dissolution of the most popular group of all time, George Harrison produced a hit single, 'The Hare Krishna Mantra,' performed by George and the devotees of the London Rādhā-Krishna Temple. The devotees did most of the singing led by Yamunā Dāsī, but George played organ, and later dubbed-in the bass. The Hare Krishna single was released in America on August 22, 1969 (Apple 1810) and in Great Britain on August 29 (Apple 25). This recording was later incorporated into an entire album featuring the London devotees, *The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Temple*, released on May 21, 1971 (Apple SKAO 3376). Soon after rising to the Top 20 best-selling record charts throughout England and Europe, and even to number one in parts of Asia, the Hare Krishna chant became a household word. In England, the BBC had featured the Hare Krishna Chanters, as they were then called, four times on the country's most popular television program, Top of the Pops.<sup>3</sup>

At this point, a savvy semiotician might make something profound out of the sequence of similarly sounding signifiers, 'hare,' 'hair,' harrison, or else ponder the coincidence of two musical George's (3 G's if you include Galt). Indeed, according to Brahmānanda Swami, Śrīla Prabhupāda had once remarked that Harrison really meant, "Hari's son."

There is certainly no doubt about the great assistance to Śrīla Prabhupāda provided by George Harrison. According to Bill Harry in a recent book on the Beatles, "Śrīla Prabhupāda died on 14 November 1977 at the age of 81. Before he died he took a gold ring from his finger, passed it to a disciple and told him, 'Please give this to George Harrison. He was a good friend to us all. He loves Krishna sincerely and I love him. He was my archangel.'"<sup>4</sup> Mukunda Goswami, who had previously presented the ring to Śrīla Prabhupāda and was in contact with the Beatles over the years, personally gave it to Harrison, who graciously accepted it.<sup>5</sup>

Although the standard popular Hare Krishna tune, as found in either the George Harrison recording or in *Hair*, may not be a traditional tune of Bengali *kīrtan*, it probably came from the Braj area surrounding Vrindaban, since several persons have attested to hearing it there long before Śrīla Prabhupāda came to America.<sup>6</sup> And since Śrīla Prabhupāda often resided in Vrindaban, it seems likely that the tune appealed to him due to its simple structure and charm. Thus one may conclude that the source of the Hare Krishna tune was, as far as the West was concerned, Śrīla Prabhupāda. He had even recorded variants of this tune a number of times (e.g., CD #2 and #12). And none of them were the same as the tunes Allen Ginsberg



learned in India from Swami Śivānanda and others, and had sung at different college campuses with his harmonium. According to Yamunā Dāśī (conversation 10-29-95), the devotees in the early days sang and played instruments exactly the way Śrīla Prabhupāda did, and did not introduce any variations or additions. Śrīla Prabhupāda taught them the simplest tunes to chant, otherwise they may have been discouraged by music that was too difficult or exotic for their fragile musical sensibilities.

Unlike singers from the villages of Bengal, Śrīla Prabhupāda did not use colloquial Bengali pronunciation in his chanting, like, for instance, 'Hare Krishno, Hare Rāmo.' His pronunciation followed the simpler Sanskrit pronunciation which is most often followed in vernacular singing by trained musicians. In fact, the customs of pronunciation in singing do not necessarily follow those of speaking. Hence, while singing, 'Hare Rāma' in either language is more technically correct than the spoken 'Hare Rāmo' in Bengali, or 'Hare Rām' in Hindi. An exception would be the Bengali *ākharas* in which the spoken Bengali pronunciation is often used. In terms of pronunciation of the Mahāmantra and other songs, then, Śrīla Prabhupāda was presenting the most genuine tradition.

In conclusion, the followers and admirers of Śrīla Prabhupāda were undeniably correct in their assessment of both him and his music. Śrīla Prabhupāda's music was authentic because *he* was authentic. As one qualified by purity and devotion to Krishna to 'churn the global ocean of nectar,' Śrīla Prabhupāda produced a *kīrtan* that soared beyond ordinary traditional musical forms of India, not by circumventing them, but by infusing those forms with a higher spiritual dimension unmatched by other contemporary saints or musicians. As Yamunā Devi has said, "he accomplished many things on many levels that we are only now beginning to comprehend and appreciate." Truly matchless, the devotional music of Śrīla Prabhupāda lives on to open our hearts and continually replenish us with his grace and perennial wisdom.

#### APPENDIX : DISCOGRAPHY

14 Compact Discs—remixed and remastered to digital from previous recordings by Kṛṣṇa-kāntī Dāsa. Available from Bhaktivedanta Archives, P.O. Box 255, Sandy Ridge, NC 27046. Phone (910) 871-3636. FAX (910) 871-3641.

1 Krishna Meditations (1974)

Jaya Rādhe Jaya Krishna

Jasomati Nandana

Śrī Krishna Caitanya Prabhu



Prayers to the Six Goswāmīs  
Goura Pahou

2 Hare Krishna Classics and Originals

Prayers to the Six Goswāmīs (1968?)  
with George Ruckert, sarod  
Śrī Brahma Saṁhitā & Purport  
Hare Krishna Mantra & Purport (1966)  
Śrī Śrī Gurvāṣṭaka  
Jaya Rādhā Mādhava

3 Songs of the Spiritual Masters

Yādavāya Namaḥ (Sept 22, 1972)  
Jiv Jāgo (Sept 22, 1972)  
Gāy Gaura Madhura Svare (Sept 22, 1972)  
Nārada Muni Bhajaya Viṇā (Sept 22, 1972)

4 Śrī Brahma Saṁhitā

Śrī Brahma Saṁhitā  
Hari Hari Bifale  
Daśavatāra

5 Prabhupāda Bhajans

Mānasa Deha Geḥa & Purport  
Śrī Krishna Caitanya Prabhu  
Bhajahu Re Mana

6 Rādhā Krishna Temple (1971)

London devotees and George Harrison

7 Vibhāvari Śeṣa

Vibhāvari Śeṣa & Purport  
Anādi Karama Phale & Purport

8 Daśavatāra (1972)

Daśavatāra Stotram & Purport  
Āmār Jivana & Purport

9 Jaya Rādhē Jaya Krishna

Gaurāṅgera Dutī Pada  
Parama Karuṇā  
Śrī Brahma Saṁhitā  
Nītai Pada Kamala

- 10 Śrī Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam  
 Śrī Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam  
 Bhajahu Re Mana  
 Parama Karuṇā  
 Bhoga Ārati
- 11 Śrī Śrī Śikṣāṣṭakam  
 Śrī Brahma Saṁhitā (1968)  
 Govinda Jaya Jaya (1968)  
 Śrī Śrī Śikṣāṣṭakam (1968)  
 Hari Haraye Namaḥ (1968)
- 12 Hare Krishna Mahāmantra  
 Vande' ham (1968-70)  
 Mahāmantra (2) (1968-70)  
 Śrī Śikṣāṣṭakam (1971)
- 13 Gaurāṅga Bhajan  
 Gaurāṅgera Dutī Pada & Purport (1970)  
 Gaura Pahu & Purport (1969-71)
- 14 Nitāi Pada Kamala  
 Nitāi Pada Kamala & Purport  
 Bhajahu Re Mana & Purport  
 Prayers of King Kulaśekhara & Purport

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Ruckert, a disciple of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan at the time, would be involved with the maestro's own school near San Francisco for 17 years, and is now teaching Indian music at M.I.T. after completing a doctorate from UC Berkeley in the music of Khan Sahib (conversation on Oct. 1, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>Stanley Richards, ed. *Great Rock Musicals* (New York: Stein & Day, 1979), p. 437.

<sup>3</sup>*Chant and be Happy: The Story of the Hare Krishna Mantra* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1982), p. 1. This small book contains an interview with George Harrison made by Mukunda Goswami on Sept. 4, 1982.

<sup>4</sup>Bill Harry, *The Ultimate Beatles Encyclopedia* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1992), p. 543.

<sup>5</sup>Conversation with Mukunda Goswami, 12-2-95.

<sup>6</sup>Conversation with Prof. M. K. Gautam, a native of Braj, on November 20, 1995.

## **“VEDIC” IN THE TERMINOLOGY OF PRABHUPĀDA AND HIS FOLLOWERS<sup>1</sup>**

Rahul Peter Das

**T**he term “Vedic” has many connotations—cultural, religious, linguistic, literary, and so forth. What this study is concerned with is the use of the word to refer to certain texts regarded as sacred and authoritative in a certain South Asian religious tradition which has been successfully transplanted into the West. To this end, we shall also have to consider the usage pertaining not only to the term “Vedic”, but also to the term “Veda”.

For an Indologist of the 19th century, matters were relatively simple: before the period of what is generally called ‘classical Hinduism’ or the like, Indian culture was Indo-Aryan and at the same time Vedic, and this culture—at the same time ancient Indian, Vedic and Indo-Aryan—was that described by the class of texts known as Vedic texts, i.e., the *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*, forming the *Ṛgvedic*, *Sāmavedic*, *Yajurvedic* and *Atharvavedic* collections, along with (according to some scholars) on historical grounds a few of the accompanying *Sūtras*, even though traditionally these latter are all regarded not as *śruti*, but as *smṛti*.

For us today, things are unfortunately not that easy. “Indo-Aryan” and “Vedic” are no more regarded as synonyms, ancient Indian culture is no more automatically taken to be the same as Vedic or Indo-Aryan culture, and the texts mentioned are no longer taken to be more or less comprehensive chronicles of the culture or cultures of those times.<sup>2</sup> Among Vedic scholars it is now generally accepted that there were in most probability various groups of Indo-Aryans that did not necessarily speak the language of, and/or did not necessarily adhere to the religion or culture portrayed in, the texts mentioned above. Also, scholars generally do not any more silently assume that the Indo-Aryans entering South Asia came into a cultural,

religious or linguistic vacuum. This being so, one tends to be more careful in the use of the terms "Indo-Aryan", "Vedic" or "ancient Indian" when referring to religion or culture.

On the other hand, to the Western classical Indologist, "Vedic" in the sphere of linguistics and literature still has a fixed connotation—namely, as referring to the corpus of texts already mentioned and to the language found in this. Of course, even this creates some difficulties, particularly with regard to many later texts in a language clearly not Vedic calling themselves Upaniṣads; but on the whole, the difficulties in this sphere are not all that great.

There is a difference, though, between what the classical Indologist understands under the term "Veda", and the corresponding adjective "Vedic", and what many South Asians (and many Westerners following them) have during the course of centuries understood, or today understand, under this term. In the oldest Vedic period that we know of, *veda*-seems to have been used to denote any sacred utterance. Since the late Vedic age, however, it denoted the three collections of the Ṛc, Sāman and Yajus. But throughout history there have been other definitions, to the Western classical Indologist redefinitions, of the term, allowing individual texts which are not Vedic by the definition mentioned above to be subsumed by, or appended to, the traditions of hallowed ancient texts, thus letting them partake of the sacrality and authoritativeness attributed to the Vedas. The oldest example of this is the controversy regarding the *Atharvavedasamhitā* and the Vedic texts associated with it, and the process has encompassed various texts such as the epics, Purāṇas, and also individual traditional scholarly texts and traditions. It is needless to go into details here, as the matter has already been chronicled by others.<sup>3</sup> Such claims have been, and continue to be, controversial in South Asia itself. This means that what we are dealing with is a problem that cannot simply be attributed to the incomprehension of supercilious Westerners.

There is, however, another South Asian tradition which more or less accepts the Vedic texts as being what the Western classical Indologist understands the term to be, but which sees historically later texts as being part of the same stream as these Vedic texts, or else as subsuming the matter contained in them and in some cases thus even being superior to them.<sup>4</sup> The culmination of this tradition—we might even call it the most radical application—is found in the school of Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇavism attributing itself to Caitanya, especially in the *Tattvasandarbha* of Jīva Gosvāmin.<sup>5</sup>

Though great emphasis is also placed upon the *Bhagavadgītā* in this regard, it is in particular the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* for which the claim of containing the teachings and precepts of the Vedas in their purest and most comprehensive form is made.<sup>6</sup> This is a claim often challenged, the most famous of such challenges being probably that by Rammohun Roy in 1818 in his reply to a Gosvāmin’s letter.<sup>7</sup> Rammohun even accused the Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇavas of falsifying evidence by passing off verses composed by themselves as Purāṇic so as to make their point. Of special interest in this context is the statement of Elkman (*op.cit.* in note 5), p.41 on the views of Baladeva, whose commentary (*Govindabhāṣya*) on the *Tattvasandarbhā* is generally regarded as the most authoritative in Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇava circles:

Baladeva argues for the supremacy of *śabda pramāṇa*, as does Jīva, but restricts his definition of *śabda* to the Vedas and Upaniṣads, thus contradicting the important Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇava belief in the authoritative nature of Purāṇas, particularly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Be that as it may, since it is this very Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇavism to which Abhaṛa Carama Bhaktibedānta Sāmī Prabhupāda,<sup>8</sup> the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), claimed affiliation, an examination of what Prabhupāda understood under the term “Vedic” is clearly of relevance not only for our understanding of his personal system of beliefs, but also of the tradition from which he came. I have therefore gone through his writings with this question in mind.

Not all of Prabhupāda’s various published works contain statements relevant in this regard. As a case in point, I may cite the only reference to Vedic I could find in his work on the *Mukundamālāstora*,<sup>9</sup> namely the non-committal, “The Vedic literature, prepared by Śrīla Vyāsadeva and filled with narrations of the Lord and His devotees...”, which does not tell us anything about what this Vedic literature is. I am therefore confining myself here to a discussion of only those works in which I found information pertinent to our particular query. Of course, I cannot claim to have gone through each and every one of the countless words to be found in the many writings of Prabhupāda, and thus I have surely missed some information I should have included in my study. But I believe that on the whole I was able to gather enough material of relevance, and doubt that what statements I may have missed will deviate in any substantial manner from this. Also, it should be pointed out that I have based my deliberations only on those statements which in my opinion are absolutely clear: Prabhupāda has of course made

innumerable remarks which tend in the same direction or can easily be interpreted similarly, but which either do not expressly mention the terms “Veda” or “Vedic”, or else do not contain information characterising them clearly.

A word of caution with regard to the purpose of my examination would not be out of place here. I have merely tried to collect Prabhupāda’s own words on the subject, without any attempt at evaluating or interpreting them with regard to their theological significance or their historical evolution. Also, my examination does not attempt in any way to determine whether his interpretations of texts such as the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, on which he relied heavily in his writings, are in any way ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The *Bhagavadgītā*, especially, would represent a great problem for any such attempt anyway, as has also been pointed out by others.<sup>10</sup> The question of any theological implication of my examination may best be left to Prabhupāda’s followers themselves.

There are many statements in the writings of Prabhupāda that differentiate between the Vedas on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the Purāṇas, particularly the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, as well as the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Mahābhārata* (both often mentioned separately, even though Prabhupāda takes pains to point out again and again that the former is a part of the latter)<sup>11</sup>, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Pāñcarātra*, and the *Vedāntasūtra* (or *Brahmasūtra*).<sup>12</sup> He also differentiates between the *Bhagavadgītā* and the Vedas by writing that in the former Kṛṣṇa personally states that “the Vedas are different laws given by the Lord”<sup>13</sup>—laws thus obviously different from those in the *Bhagavadgītā*. The latter is also characterised as clarifying the Vedas, and thus different from them.<sup>14</sup>

At times the differentiation is not with the Vedas, but with “Vedic literature”.<sup>15</sup> The Purāṇas and “Vedic literature” are also termed “sister literatures”.<sup>16</sup> The Vedas are often described as four or enumerated by name, namely as the Vedas of R̥c, Yajus, Sāman and Atharvan.<sup>17</sup> They are called *śruti*, and are differentiated from other texts characterised as *smṛti*. But *śruti* and *smṛti* are also differentiated from the Purāṇas and *Pañcarātra*.<sup>18</sup> The *Bhāgavadgītā* is called *smṛti*.<sup>19</sup>

All this seems to show that Prabhupāda is squarely in accord with Western classical Indologists in regard to what he understands under the term “Veda”. But actually things are not that clear, for there are also other statements which create difficulties for this deduction, statements which are, however, in accord with well-known beliefs of Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇavism. Thus, in

spite of his differentiating between Vedic and non-Vedic literature, Prabhupāda nevertheless regards some texts which are non-Vedic by this definition—particularly the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*—as being the essence of Vedic thought.<sup>20</sup>

The Vedic Mantras are said to be explicated and supplemented by the Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>21</sup> In this latter statement Prabhupāda is clearly echoing Bhaktibinod Ṭhākura,<sup>22</sup> who regarded the Purāṇas as “explanatory notes” of the Vedas.<sup>23</sup> “Veda” is moreover defined as “the aggregate of knowledge”, and it is held that “whatever knowledge is required for human society is perfectly presented in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*”.<sup>24</sup> This is so because, according to Prabhupāda, Vyāsa wrote the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as an explanation of the *Vedāntasūtra* (or *Brahmasūtra*), which itself contains the essence of the Upaniṣads.<sup>25</sup> the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* explains not only the *Brahmasūtra*, but also the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the *Vedāntasūtra* and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are regarded as being superior to the Vedas, viz., the four Saṁhitās and “their corollaries known as *śikṣā*, *kalpa*, *vyākaraṇa*, *nirukta*, *chanda* and *jyotiṣa*” by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura;<sup>27</sup> Prabhupāda obviously approves of this opinion.<sup>28</sup>

Vyāsa also divided the Veda(s)<sup>29</sup> into four divisions (namely the four known divisions of Ṛc, Sāman, Yajus and Atharvan), or else compiled them. After that, he authored the Purāṇas, or expanded the Vedas into these. Vyāsa is also called the author, not only of the *Brahmasūtra*<sup>30</sup> together with its commentary, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, but also of the *Mahābhārata* (containing the *Bhagavadgītā*).<sup>31</sup> Indeed, before Vyāsa, the Vedas were “simply heard”, and it was he who wrote them down: “he left all the Vedic knowledge in book form, such as the *Purāṇas*, *Vedānta*, *Mahābhārata* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*”.<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere, Prabhupāda says:

The less intelligent classes of men, namely women, *śūdras* and unqualified sons of the higher castes, are devoid of necessary qualifications to understand the purpose of the transcendental *Vedas*. For them, the *Mahābhārata* was prepared.

The text goes on to say that the *Mahābhārata* contains the summary of the Vedas called the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is thus “the essence of all Vedic knowledge”.<sup>33</sup>

All these texts are also called Vedic,<sup>34</sup> and they all go back to Vyāsa, who is the author of all Vedic literature, and an incarnation of Nārāyaṇa.<sup>35</sup> Thus it is actually Kṛṣṇa who divided the Vedas into four, explained these in the

Purāṇas: “for less capable people He wrote the *Mahābhārata*” (of which the *Bhagavadgītā* is a part), at the same time summarising all Vedic literature in the *Vedāntasūtra*, and commenting on this in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.<sup>36</sup>

Echoing an old, though not universally accepted opinion in South Asia, Prabhupāda also says that the *Mahābhārata* is regarded as the fifth Veda, and that this therefore also applies to the *Bhagavadgītā*, contained within it.<sup>37</sup> This, we are told, “is also Vedic literature (*smṛti*). Some of the Vedic literatures are called *śruti*s, and some are called *smṛti*s.”<sup>38</sup>

This statement, which echoes older notions, such as, for instance, those of the *Sarvamatasāṅgraha*,<sup>39</sup> is very interesting. That the *Bhagavadgītā* is expressly called *smṛti* shows that it is not part of the Vedic literature in the sense we have discussed first, and which Prabhupāda himself calls *śruti*. Yet it is nevertheless called Vedic. And Prabhupāda also expressly says that both *smṛti* and *śruti* are Vedic, which tallies with what we have just seen on other texts such as the epics, Purāṇas, and others also being called “Vedic”.

These two definitions of “Vedic” are irreconcilable semantically; and so it is clear that what we have here are actually two different meanings of the word “Vedic”. I propose to designate them as “Vedic<sub>1</sub>” and “Vedic<sub>2</sub>” respectively. “Vedic<sub>1</sub>” is used in the sense in which Western classical Indologists also generally use the term; whereas “Vedic<sub>2</sub>” has a much wider application and may subsume “Vedic<sub>1</sub>”. “Vedic<sub>1</sub>” obviously is more a linguistic and historical term, whereas “Vedic<sub>2</sub>” derives more from the contents of the works so labelled. It is consistent with this latter meaning that Prabhupāda also says that “Vedic knowledge is called *śruti*,”<sup>40</sup> a mode of expression which allows a very wide interpretation.

That this use of the same word to designate two different things may cause confusion is clear. Prabhupāda too seems to have been aware of this, for every so often we find that he uses “Vedic literatures” when he refers to what I have called “Vedic<sub>2</sub>”,<sup>41</sup> although he is following no rule with this inasmuch as the terms “Vedic” and “Vedic literature” too are used in this same context. However, as far as I can see, “Vedic<sub>1</sub>” seems to be associated mostly with these latter terms, not with “Vedic literatures”. I did, however, also find a reference to “Vedic literatures” with only the Upaniṣads mentioned as examples,<sup>42</sup> as well as a differentiation between “all the Vedic literatures” and the Purāṇas.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, I found, too, a definition of the expression “Vedic literatures” which substantiates the deduction that as a rule this term refers to “Vedic<sub>2</sub>”:



The Vedas—*Sāma*, *Yajur*, *Rg* and *Atharva*—and any books deriving knowledge from these Vedas are considered Vedic literatures.<sup>44</sup>

I have already mentioned that the wide application of the term “Veda” and the corresponding adjective “Vedic” has not gone unchallenged in South Asia; indeed, it remains a bone of contention to this very day. Yet even many challenging this usage of the word seem not to be able to escape the influence of this very usage, as an extract from a small booklet setting forth tenets of the Ārya Samāj shows:

The Vedas are four in number, The Rg. Veda [sic], The Yajur Veda, The Sama Veda, The Atharva [sic] Veda. Vedic literature consists of other treatises also, some commentaries, others [sic] notes, legends and stories of different values, written in different times and under different circumstances. As far as the Arya Samaj in [sic] concerned, the Vedas are the final authority. All other treatises, old or new, small or big, are only of secondary importance.<sup>45</sup>

This confusion has had the not surprising effect of necessitating a clarification of some sort. Often it is explained that those texts which qualify as “Vedic” according to the definition also followed by Western classical Indologists is referred to as the original Vedas. Prabhupāda also follows this terminology at times,<sup>46</sup> even differentiating between the original Vedas and the “supplementary Vedic literatures” (namely the Purāṇas).<sup>47</sup> But he notes with disapproval the Ārya Samāj’s acceptance of only these original Vedas as authoritative.<sup>48</sup>

Prabhupāda also draws attention to statements in Madhva’s commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* which bolster his usage of “Veda” to correspond to “Vedic<sub>2</sub>”. He draws attention to the commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 1,1,3 as proof that according to Madhva the four Vedic Saṁhitās, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Pāñcarātra* and the “original *Rāmāyaṇa*” (as he translates Madhva’s *mūlarāmāyaṇa*-) are “Vedic literatures”. Prabhupāda holds that according to Madhva “any literature following the conclusive statements of this Vedic literature is also to be considered Vedic literature”.<sup>49</sup> Actually, in the passage referred to, Madhva designates these texts only as *śāstra*,<sup>50</sup> but Prabhupāda also quotes another verse from Madhva’s commentary on 2,1,5 (Prabhupāda refers to it as 2,1,6),<sup>51</sup> which clearly designates these same texts, as

well as the Purāṇas accepted as authoritative by Vaiṣṇavas, as “Veda”.<sup>52</sup> Though Madhva only quotes this verse from a Purāṇa, the fact that he does obviously accept it as authoritative shows that he subscribes to its views.<sup>53</sup> It should be noted, however, that (at least as far as I could ascertain) Prabhupāda does not seem to follow Madhva to the extent of calling texts other than those already referred to above “Vedic”, i.e., in extending the scope of what I have designated as “Vedic<sub>2</sub>” even more.

In this context I may be permitted to draw attention to the fact that the *Bhagavadgītā* is also traditionally known as an Upaniṣad. Prabhupāda too does not fail to draw attention to this.<sup>54</sup> May not such traditional terminology have facilitated the development of the semantic field of what I have labelled “Vedic<sub>2</sub>”?

This brings us to another problem regarding Prabhupāda’s terminology. A few times he refers to the Vedas *and* the Upaniṣads,<sup>55</sup> even though the former mostly subsumes the latter. Such a differentiation is clearly problematic, unless it refers not to the differentiation between Vedic and non-Vedic texts, but to texts more concerned with sacrifice and those not concerned with the topic, viz., to non-Upaniṣadic Vedic texts and the Upaniṣads. Or else “Veda” here is used in the same archaic sense which Bronkhorst<sup>56</sup> has drawn attention to, namely to denote the Mantras, here in their collected form (as the Saṁhitās), thus differentiating them from other Vedic texts.

This explanation seems indeed to be the correct one, for Prabhupāda also explicitly speaks of four Vedas and the Upaniṣads,<sup>57</sup> and also differentiates between “*Upaniṣads* and *Vedic mantras*”<sup>58</sup> (even though *mantra*- is elsewhere used to refer to quotations from the Upaniṣads too).<sup>59</sup> Thus, it does seem that what is meant here is a differentiation primarily between the Saṁhitās and the Upaniṣads, the place of Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas remaining unclear. And it is the Saṁhitās, in contradistinction to the Upaniṣads, which are in the context of this differentiation referred to as “Vedas”.

We thus have another use of “Vedic” here, which I propose to label “Vedics”. The differentiation between Vedas and Upaniṣads is incidentally also referred to by another branch of the *paramparā* associated with Bhaktibinod Thākura.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, we find a usage of the word “Veda” (without, so it seems, any corresponding adjective “Vedic”) which seems confined to Prabhupāda’s oral discourses and does not—at least as far as I could ascertain—appear in his

writings.<sup>61</sup> In this case, Prabhupāda recurs to the primary meaning of *veda*, namely, "(sacred) knowledge", and applies this to the sacred scriptures of any religion, as examples naming the Bible and the Koran.<sup>62</sup> But it seems that this use of the word "Veda" to refer to scripture associated with other religious traditions is hardly known, probably because it is—seemingly—not found in Prabhupāda's writings, but only in the transcripts of his conversations, which are not easy to come by.

One could hold that, actually, *veda*- is not used in the sense of "(sacred) knowledge" here. Rather, this terminology could imply that other scriptural traditions are regarded as being but variants of the "Vedic" tradition—such theories are indeed to be found in modern South Asia. This is, however, a problem I leave for others to investigate. What remains relevant for us is Prabhupāda's usage of *veda*- to describe other religious traditions.

Thus we see that Prabhupāda uses the same word "Vedic" in three different meanings: "Vedic<sub>1</sub>" approximates most closely to what the Western classical Indologist too would understand by this term; "Vedic<sub>2</sub>" refers to texts containing what is to Prabhupāda Vedic thought and which are hallowed inasmuch as they are derived from Vyāsa; and "Vedic<sub>3</sub>" is a narrower application of Vedic<sub>1</sub>, referring only to the Sāṁhitās (as contrasted to the Upaniṣads) and thus continuing an ancient usage of the term. He also is on record as using "Veda" to refer to other scriptural traditions. Obviously, this usage of the same term in different meanings is liable to lead to misunderstandings, unless one is able to carefully differentiate these different meanings in each individual case in which the term is used.

Have those following in Prabhupāda's footsteps always been aware of these differentiations? I have already briefly remarked on this problem of the usage of "Vedic" and "Veda" elsewhere,<sup>63</sup> as also on the fact that some scholars, particularly from North America (and not necessarily affiliated to ISKCON), also often do not explicate what they mean by "Vedic" in certain problematic contexts.<sup>64</sup> This latter is in no small part due to the fact that a similar variety of meanings also seems to obtain in other modern writings on South Asian religions, especially writings from groups professing these religions.

Although it would be highly interesting to examine this problem and how such terminological issues may have influenced Prabhupāda, our concern here is only with finding out what Prabhupāda means in his writings, and how what he means has influenced others. To obtain an answer to

this latter question, I have examined a sampling of writing by scholars affiliated with ISKCON or influenced by Prabhupāda, and have analysed their use of the terms “Veda” and/or “Vedic”. Unfortunately, I could obtain only a handful of works,<sup>65</sup> and of these only a few contained relevant information. But I think that these few will nevertheless serve to give some idea of the usage prevailing, even if they may not be truly representative.

A work by Nanda-nandana<sup>66</sup> is particularly interesting in this regard. He first refers to the Vedic literatures (mark the plural!) as being composed, in its oldest part, of the *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*, followed by the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads. But he then goes on to add the *Vedāntasūtra*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Mahābhārata*, the Purāṇas and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (p.23). Yet he seems aware of the problems connected with this terminology, as he refers to the Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata* as “Vedic supplementary literatures” (pp.37f.) and differentiates between *śruti* and *smṛti*, to which latter he reckons the Purāṇas, *Bhagavadgītā* and *Mahābhārata* (p.38). Interestingly, his definition of *śruti* is “the four Vedas and the Upaniṣads”. This clearly characterises the Saṃhitās alone as being “Veda” in a narrow sense. He further quotes Śaṅkara, of whom Prabhupāda’s opinion is ambivalent, to show that the *Bhagavadgītā* is “the epitome of the essentials of the whole Vedic teaching” (p.38), and also cites passages from the Purāṇas, claiming that these are Vedic as well. He draws attention to a passage from the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* that regards the Itihāsas and Purāṇas as the fifth Veda. From all of this he deduces that all the texts he has mentioned are “authentic Vedic literatures” (p.38). Once the bona fides of these works as Vedic has been established, the author basically uses only the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* to explain “secret teachings of the Vedas”.

The similarities of Nanda-nandana’s many-faceted usage of “Veda” and “Vedic” with that of Prabhupāda are too obvious to need comment. It seems, though, that Nanda-nandana is quite aware of the potential for confusion contained in such usage, and thus systematically explains his terminology before starting on his actual subject matter. In this he differs from Prabhupāda, whose remarks are, as we have seen, scattered throughout his opera, and not explicated systematically.

Satsvarūpa-dāsa too, in his work on Vedic literature,<sup>67</sup> basically has the same arguments found in the work of Nanda-nandana (pp.1f.), even differentiating between “The Four Vedas” and “The Upaniṣads” (pp.40ff.). His

gleanings from “Vedic” literature also are, not surprisingly, as a rule from the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Thus, he too seems to give us a more or less faithful representation of the ideas of Prabhupāda. But he further adds a statement which introduces a subtle twist, and the matter seems to me so interesting that I shall quote the relevant passage (pp.1f.) in full:

In any case, to be accepted as Vedic, a literature must maintain the same purpose as the original Vedic texts. The Vedic scriptures (*śāstras*) comprise a harmonious whole with a harmonious conclusion (*siddhānta*). Consequently, we may accept as a bona fide Vedic writing any work that expands on the Vedic *siddhānta* without changing its meaning, even if the work is not one of the original scriptures. In fact, the Vedic tradition necessitates further authoritative works that convey the Vedic message according to time and place. However, to be genuine, these extensions of Vedic literature must strictly conform to the doctrines of the *Vedas*, the *Purāṇas*, and the *Vedānta-Sūtra*.

Vedic literature is neither dead nor archaic. Nevertheless, any literature—be it ancient or modern—must be considered non-Vedic if it deviates from the Vedic *siddhānta*. Thus Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, though definitely outgrowths of Vedic literature, are not considered Vedic.

This, as is obvious, could allow one on the one hand to bestow the epithet “Vedic” on many more texts than those mentioned by Prabhupāda, while at the same time rejecting certain texts Prabhupāda considers to be Vedic. In both cases the main criterion is the contents of the individual work, and clearly this facilitates manipulation. As it is, although I have found no evidence at all for individual works, or their parts, regarded as “Vedic” by Prabhupāda being rejected as non-Vedic, there are examples in the writings of Satsvarūpa-dāsa for an extension of the scope of the epithet “Vedic”. Thus in a “book of essays on selected verses of Vedic literatures”<sup>68</sup> we find quoted, obviously as examples of Vedic literature, alongside the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Brahmasaṁhitā* and the Upaniṣads, also Caitanya’s *Śikṣāṣṭaka* and Sanātana Gosvāmin’s *Haribhaktivilāsa*.

One may argue that these are extremely important works for Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇavism; but what about the case of the *Prabhupādapraṇāmamantra* (p.125)? Satsvarūpa-dāsa too is clearly aware that this is not actually Vedic, but justifies its inclusion on the grounds that it “will continue to be recited just like classical Vedic *ślokas*” (p.134).<sup>69</sup> This is a most interesting develop-

ment, and it clearly accords with what Madhva says in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*.<sup>70</sup> However, as I have already pointed out, I have not found evidence that Prabhupāda followed Madhva in this. Even though Prabhupāda does say too that "any books deriving knowledge from these Vedas are considered Vedic literatures",<sup>71</sup> I have found no evidence that he has actually interpreted this definition so widely. But such an interpretation is possible if one takes such statements literally, and this seems to have been the case with Satsvarūpa-dāsa.

Ravindrasvarūpa-dāsa, however, takes a different approach in his collection of essays<sup>72</sup>. He mentions Vedic knowledge often, and the *Bhagavadgītā* is referred to as being the essence of this (p.51), but, as far as I could ascertain, it is nowhere called Vedic literature. In fact, the only time he defines the term "Veda" is when he says: "Vyāsa divided the *Veda* into four and wrote it down. Yet he knew that we would still be unable to understand the *Vedas*, and so he composed a number of supplementary works in which he spelled out the intentions of Vedic thought explicitly" (p.51). It is obvious that the "supplementary works" are the very ones which I have called "Vedic<sub>2</sub>". In this way Ravindrasvarūpa avoids the ambiguity of Prabhupāda's terminology. He could even have pointed to a similar usage by Prabhupāda himself.<sup>73</sup>

The last significant author I would like to mention is Steven Rosen. He follows Prabhupāda's terminology in that several times he calls "Vedic" all the texts for which I have chosen the labels "Vedic<sub>1</sub>" and "Vedic<sub>2</sub>".<sup>74</sup> According to him, the "many sections of the Vedic texts" include the *smṛ-ti*.<sup>75</sup> He explicitly calls the Purāṇas "later 'Vedic' texts".<sup>76</sup> But the word "Vedic" in the last citation is put within quotation marks, which could be Rosen's way of differentiating it from what I have called Prabhupāda's "Vedic<sub>1</sub>".

Thus, even this very small sampling of writings shows a diverse usage of the term "Vedic", a usage which may at times be considered not a faithful reproduction of Prabhupāda's own usage. The possible implications, if any, of such discrepancies are not a part of this study. Neither have I been concerned here with the problem thrown up if Prabhupāda's spiritual lineage should, as Elkman (op.cit. in note 5) holds, ultimately extend back to Baladeva (p.186)—the same Baladeva who, again according to Elkman (p.41), does not believe in the authoritative nature of the Purāṇas, including the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.<sup>77</sup>

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- BG A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is. Complete Edition with original Sanskrit text, Roman transliteration, English equivalents, translation and elaborate purports*. Fifth printing. New York (Collier Books)/London (Collier Macmillan Publishers) 1974.
- BP *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam...With the Original Sanskrit Text, Its Roman Transliteration, Synonyms, Translation and Elaborate Purports* by...A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. New York/Los Angeles/London/Bombay (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1972-1980 (up to volume 10.3, the later volumes were completed by Prabhupāda’s disciples).
- CC *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī. ...with the original Bengali text, Roman transliterations, synonyms, translation and elaborate purports* by...A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. New York/Los Angeles/London/Bombay (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1973-1975.
- ND A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *The Nectar of Devotion. The Complete Science of Bhakti Yoga. A Summary Study of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Bhaktīrasāmṛta-sindhu*. New York/Los Angeles/London/Bombay (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1970.
- SR A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *The Science of Self Realization*. Reprint Los Angeles/London/Paris/Bombay/Sydney (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1994.
- TC A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *Teachings of Lord Caitanya. The Golden Avatāra*. New York/Los Angeles/London/Bombay (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1974.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article was originally presented as a paper at the Śrīla Prabhupāda Conference in Detroit, November 3-5, 1995. It was first printed in the *ISKCON Communications Journal* 4.[1996],2, pp.23-38. A few small additions have been made in the present version; these include the last footnote.

<sup>2</sup> On this issue see also the remarks by Patrick Olivelle in his review of Johannes Bronkhorst’s *The Two Sources of Indian Asceticism* (Bern 1993) in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115.1995, pp.162-164.

<sup>3</sup> See Johannes Bronkhorst: "Veda", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 70.1989, pp.125-135. Cf. also Michael Witzel: "The Vedic Literature", *Vaiṣṇavism. Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauṛīya Tradition*. Steven J. Rosen, editor. New York (Folk Books) 1992, pp.19-26; as well as Frederick M. Smith: "Purāṇa-veda", *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon. Essays in Vedic Interpretation*. Edited by Laurie L. Patton. Delhi (Sri Satguru Publications) 1994 (Sri Garib Das Oriental Series 183), pp.97-138.

<sup>4</sup> On this see e.g., Wilhelm Halbfass: *India and Europe. An Essay in Understanding*. Albany (State University of New York Press) 1988, pp.359-367.

<sup>5</sup> Jiva's arguments have been conveniently presented on pp.75ff. of Stuart Mark Elman: *Jīva Gosvāmin's Tattvasandarbhā. A Study on the Philosophical and Sectarian Development of the Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇava Movement*. Delhi/Varanasi/Patna/Madras (Motilal Banarsidass) 1986. See also Heramba Chatterjee Sastri: "Criticism on the Source-Materials of the Vaiṣṇava Philosophy of Bengal", *Vaiṣṇavism in Eastern India*. Edited by Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya. Calcutta (Firma KLM under the auspices of the University of Calcutta) 1995, pp.19-27 (esp. pp.22ff.); as well as J. Ganguly Shastri: "The Absorption of Non-Vedic Vaiṣṇavism into the Fold of Smārta Religion in Eastern India", *ibid.*, pp.34-45 (esp. pp.40ff.).

<sup>6</sup> Halbfass too has not failed to draw due attention to this.

<sup>7</sup> Rām'mohan Rāy: "Gosbāmīr sahīr bicār", *Rām'mohan racanābalī (samagra bāmlā racanā, saṃskṛta o phārsī racanār anubād, patrābalī ebaṃ pradhān pradhān imrāji racanāsa-ha ek khaṇṇe sampūrṇa)*. Pradhān sampādak Ajit'kumār Ghoṣ. Sampādak maṇṇālī Maṇi Bāg'ci, Śib'dās Cakrabartī, Āb'dul Ājij Ālī-Āmān. Kal'kāṭā (Haraph Prakāśānī) 1973, pp.155-168; see pp.158-161. The whole tract has been translated into English: "Reply to a Gosvāmin, 1818", *The Only True God, works on religion by Rammohun Roy selected and translated from Bengali and Sanskrit, with an introduction and notes*, by D.H. Killingley. Newcastle upon Tyne (Grevatt & Grevatt) 1982, pp.30-45 (see pp.35-38).

<sup>8</sup> This is the Bengali form of the name, anglicised as Abhay Charan Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. In ISCKON writings, the last part of the name is generally given with a diacritic sign as Prabhupāda.

<sup>9</sup> A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda...And His Disciples: *Mukunda-Mālā-Stotra. The Prayers of King Kulaśekhara*. Los Angeles/London/Stockholm/Bombay/Sydney/Hong Kong (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1992, p.35.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. Gerald James Larson: "The song celestial: Two centuries of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in English", *Philosophy East and West* 31.1981, pp.513-541.

<sup>11</sup> I have not felt up to examining in detail Prabhupāda's views of the relationship between *Mahābhārata* and *Bhagavadgītā*, and their position within the continuum of traditional, and varying, opinions in this regard. I also could not examine whether the fact that there were different recensions of the *Bhagavadgītā*, and a traditional controversy surrounding the question of which recension is most authentic, may



have played a role in his deliberations. (On the traditional controversy on the authenticity of different recensions, see e.g., F. Otto Schrader: “Neues über die Bhagavadgītā”, *Aus Indiens Kultur. Festgabe Richard von Garbe dem Forscher und Lehrer zu seinem 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Freunden, Verehrern und Schülern*. Im Verein mit Alfred Hillebrandt und Hermann Jacobi herausgegeben von Julius von Negelein. Erlangen (Palm & Enke) 1927, pp.171-183.)

<sup>12</sup> Examples are: SR, pp.80f., TC, pp.66;226;231, BG, pp.122;504;529;726, BP 1.1,pp.92f., 1.2,pp.48;169, 3.2,p.280, 4.4,p.473, 6.1,pp.34f. In some cases the statements are not so explicit, as e.g., SR, p.104, which states that the chanting of the name of Kṛṣṇa “is recommended in the Vedas. In the *Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa* it is clearly stated that it is only chanting of the holy name of Hari (Kṛṣṇa) that can save people”. Is the Purāṇic text being called Vedic in this statement? Or is the statement of the Purāṇa merely a reinforcement of the foregoing statement? The latter seems to be the case, for Prabhupāda after a while continues: “And, if you want references from the Vedas, I can give you many.” This seems to show that what was quoted before (and this includes the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is quoted after the *Bṛhan-nāradyapurāṇa*), is not Vedic, especially since the following quotations are from the *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad* and the *Atharvavedasaṁhitā*. After this (pp.96ff.) we find quotations from other texts, including the *Bhagavadgītā*, which refer to the Vedas, from which it also seems to follow that these latter texts are not regarded as Vedic by Prabhupāda. I have neglected statements of this sort and confined myself to listing only those with a clear distinction.

<sup>13</sup> BG, p.783.

<sup>14</sup> BG, p.782.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., BG, pp.590;726.

<sup>16</sup> TC, p.108.

<sup>17</sup> The usual forms given by Prabhupāda are: Rg, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva respectively. BG, p.472 refers to three Vedas (of R̥c, Sāman and Yajus).

<sup>18</sup> E.g., SR, pp.229f. See also SR, p.110.

<sup>19</sup> SR, p.111.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance SR, p.111, BG, p.28, BP 1.1,pp.57;194;332, 1.2,pp.176;298, 1.3,p.155, 6.1,p.284, 8.2,p.179, 10.1,p.69, 10.3,p.62.

<sup>21</sup> CC Madhya-līlā 2,p.276, BP 1.1,pp.54;93;214f.;229.

<sup>22</sup> Here again I am using the Bengali form of the name, whose Sanskrit equivalent is Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

<sup>23</sup> Rūpa-vilāsa dāsa Adhikārī: *The Seventh Goswami. A Biography of His Divine Grace Śrīla Saccidānanda Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura* (1838-1914). Edited by Karmāmṛta dāsa Adhikārī. Washington MS (New Jaipur Press) 1989 (Lives of the Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas 2), p.198.

- 24 ND, p.105.
- 25 TC, pp.201;240;247;259, BP 1.1, pp.242;348.
- 26 TC, p.247.
- 27 The Bengali form of the name, the Sanskrit form being Bhatissiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura.
- 28 CC Madhya-lilā 7, p.254. Cf. also the references in note 20.
- 29 BP 9.2, p.209 has the interesting explanation that the Veda in its undivided form was "the *Atharva Veda* (or, some say, the *Yajur Veda*)". On this explanation with regard to the *Yajurveda* cf. Elkman (op.cit. in note 5), pp.81-83.
- 30 Whose matter is identical to that in the *Pāñcarātra* (TC, p.211).
- 31 E.g., CC Madhya-lilā 8, p.200, Antya-lilā 3, p.136, BP 1.1, pp.165;220, 6.2, p.78, TC, pp.211;248.
- 32 ND, p.50.
- 33 BP 1.1, p.226. See also CC, Madhya-lilā 2, p.276, BP 1.1, pp.204;229.
- 34 E.g., BG, pp.3;172ff.;253;463;581;767, SR, p.153, TC, p.61;218;232, CC Ādililā 1, p.111, 2, pp.84;92;106;178;188, 3, p.343, Madhya-lilā 2, p.268, 7, pp.254;378, BP 1.1, p.57;65;195;215;220f.;252;255;290, 1.2, p.103, 1.3, p.155, 3.2, pp.155;190, 8.1, p.136, 9.3, p.241, 10.2, p.42. CC Ādililā 2, p.128 quotes a verse saying *vede rāmāyaṇe caiva purāṇe bhārata tathā*, in which the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Purāṇas* and the *Mahābhārata* are clearly differentiated from the Veda (singular); this is, however, translated as: "In the Vedic literature, including the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Purāṇas* and *Mahābhārata*..."
- 35 TC, p.259.
- 36 BG, pp.24;713.
- 37 BG, p.130, CC Madhya-lilā 8, p.200, BP 1.1, p.220 (the *Purāṇas* and *Saṁhitās*—here probably not the Vedic ones, for these are already mentioned, but the *Vaiṣṇava Saṁhitās*—are also mentioned as a fifth Veda). BP 3.2, p.155 refers to the *Purāṇas* as the fifth Veda.
- 38 CC Madhya-lilā 8, p.200.
- 39 Halbfass (see note 4), p.354: "The Vedas and their auxiliary sciences (*vedāṅga*) are considered to be of 'non-human origin,' while the 'fifth Veda,' i.e., the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, the 'additional Vedas,' and the *Smṛti* (i.e., *Dharmaśāstra*) are of 'human origin' [according to this text]."
- 40 BG, p.718.
- 41 BG, pp.24;253;366, SR, p.153, TC, pp.61;218;232, CC Ādililā 2, pp.92;106;178;188, BP 1.1, pp.57;195;255;290, 1.2, p.103, 9.3, p.241.
- 42 BG, p.600.

43 BP 1.1,p.92.

44 BP 6.1,p.284.

45 Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya: *The Vedas. Holy Scriptures of Aryans*. Allahabad (Arya Samaj Vishva-Prachar Series) n.d. (Arya Samaj Vishva-Prachar Series 3), p.32.

46 E.g., BG, p.626, BP 1.1,pp.229;332.

47 TC, p.273. BG, p.223 differentiates only between “the Vedas” and “the Vedic supplementary literatures”, an example of which is the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Similarly, CC, Ādilīlā 2,p.178 refers to “Vedic literatures such as the four Vedas and the Purāṇas”.

48 TC, p.267: “In India there is a class of men known as *ārya-samāja* who say that they accept the original Vedas only and reject all other Vedic literatures. The motive of these people, however, is to give their own interpretation.”

49 CC Madhya-līlā 2,p.276.

50 Ānandathirtha [sic] Bhagavatpāda (Madhwacharya): *Sarvāmula Granthāḥ* [sic]. *Prasthānatrayi* [sic]. (With the versions of the oldest manuscript of Sri Hrīshikesha Thirtha [sic], one of the direct disciples of Sri Ananda thirtha [sic]. Volume—I. (Sanskrit title: Ānandatīrthabhagavatpāda: *Sarvāmūlagranthāḥ*. *Śrīmadācāryapāda śiṣyapraravaśīrHṛṣīkeśatīrthādīlikhitapratānatarakośānussārīpāṭhasaṁvalitam*, *pāthāntaraviśeṣaṭippaṇyādibhir upodbalitam*, *prasthānatrayavyākhyārūpaṁ prathamam sampuṭam*.) Udipi (Akhila Bhārata Mādhva Mahā Mandala) 1969, p.10 of *Sūtraprasthānam*:

*rgyajuṣṣāmātharvās ca bhāratam pañcarātrakam*  
*mūlarāmāyaṇam caiva śāstram ity abhidhiyate*  
*yac cānukūlam etasya tac ca śāstram prakīrtitam*  
*ato 'nyo granthavistāro naiva śāstram kuvartma tat.*

51 CC Madhya-līlā 2,p.267, TC, p.270.

52 Op.cit. in note 50, p.60 of *Sūtraprasthānam*:

*rgyajuṣṣāmātharvākhyā* (var.: *-sāmātharvās ca*) *mūlarāmāyaṇam tathā*,  
*bhāratam pañcarātram ca vedā ity eva śabdītāḥ*  
*purāṇāni ca yāniha vaiṣṇavāni vido viduḥ*  
*svataḥ prāmāṇyam eteṣāṁ nātra kiñcid vicāryate.*

53 Cf. on Madhva’s statements also Halbfass (see note 4), p.360.

54 BG, p.3.

55 BG, p.138, SR, pp.99;111, BP 1.1,p.332, 1.2,p.142, 4.4,p.473, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *Kṛṣṇa. The Supreme Personality of Godhead. A Summary Study of Śrīla Vyāsadeva’s Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Tenth Canto*. Volume One. Twelfth Printing Los Angeles/London/Paris/Bombay/Sydney/Hong Kong (The Bhaktivedanta Book

Trust) 1984, p.108.

<sup>56</sup> See note 3.

<sup>57</sup> BG, pp.581;713, BP 6.2,p.78.

<sup>58</sup> CC Ādililā 2, p.106.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., CC Ādililā 2,p.125. Unfortunately, I did not note down other occurrences, but there are several.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., *Śrīmad Bhagavad-Gītā. The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*. Editor: Prabhupāda Bhaktisiddhānta Saraswatī Goswāmī Mahārāja, Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Deva Goswāmī Mahārāja, rendered into English by Akṣayānanda Swāmī Mahārāja. Nabadwip Dham (Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math) 1985, pp.xxxviif.

<sup>61</sup> Brahmānanda Dās was kind enough to point out this usage to me and to supply me with the relevant references.

<sup>62</sup> See e.g., *Collected Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Unedited and Unabridged Complete Archival Collectors Edition. Volume Four*. Los Angeles/London/Bombay/Sydney/Stockholm/Hong Kong (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1994, pp.135f. (note particularly p.136: "Bible is also part of Vedas", where the plural at once makes one think of the Saṁhitās), A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *Beyond Birth and Death*. Eighth English Printing. Los Angeles/London/Paris/Frankfurt/Bombay (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1979, p.7; A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *Conversations With Aṛila Prabhupāda. Unedited and Unabridged Complete Archival Collectors Edition. Volume Five*. London, July 12, 1973 to Stockholm, September 5, 1973. Los Angeles/London/Bombay/Sydney/Stockholm/Hong Kong (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1989, p.46; and A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda: *Collected Lectures on Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is. Unedited and Unabridged Complete Archival Collectors Edition. Volume Two*. 2.13—3.13. Los Angeles/London/Bombay/Sydney/Stockholm/Hong Kong (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1995, pp.403f.

<sup>63</sup> See p.154 of Rahul Peter Das: "Neuere Werke zum bengalischen Vaiṣṇavismus", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 143.1993, pp.135-178, or, p.65 of Rahul Peter Das: *Essays on Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal*. Calcutta (Firma KLM) 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Thus Edward C. Dimock, Jr. in his foreword to BG, p.x refers to Prabhupāda's interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā* as "the Vedic exegetical tradition, justly famous, in action". One would really have liked to know what exactly Dimock means by this remark.

<sup>65</sup> Mostly through the good offices of Steven Rosen.

<sup>66</sup> Nanda-nandana: *The Secret Teachings of the Vedas: The Ancient Knowledge of the East*. Detroit (The World Relief Network) 1986.

<sup>67</sup> Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswāmī: *Readings in Vedic Literature. The Tradition Speaks for Itself*. New York/Los Angeles/London/Bombay (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) 1977.

<sup>68</sup> Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami: *Living with the Scriptures. Volume I*. Philadelphia (Gitā-Nāgarī Press) 1984, p.v.

<sup>69</sup> I may also mention in this context that on pp.91 Prabhupāda is quoted as answering a question on “Hinduism”, namely on what he considers its most important text passages. Satsvarūpa-dāsa rephrases this question as one asking for the most important part of Vedic knowledge (p.95), but that is not the question, nor does Prabhupāda answer in this vein.

<sup>70</sup> See notes 50 and 52.

<sup>71</sup> See above, note 44.

<sup>72</sup> Ravindra-svarupa dasa: *Endless Love. Collected Essays 1978-1983*. [Philadelphia] (Gita-Nagari Press) 1984.

<sup>73</sup> See note 47.

<sup>74</sup> Examples are: Steven J. Rosen: *Narasimha Avatar. The Half-Man/Half-Lion Incarnation*. [New York] (Folk Books) 1994, p.11 (speaks of “Veda” and “Vedic literature”, when what is referred to is clearly the Purāṇas); Steven Rosen: *Food for the Spirit. Vegetarianism and the World Religions*. [Reprint] Old Westbury, N.Y. (Bala/Entourage Books) 1990, p.71 (“Vedic literature” includes the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, the *Mahābhārata* together with the *Bhagavadgītā*, and the Purāṇas); *Om Shalom: Judaism and Krishna Consciousness. Conversations Between Rabbi Jacob N. Shimmel and Satyaraja Dasa Adhikari* [= Steven Rosen]. Brooklyn, New York (Folk Books) 1990, p.202 (“Vedic texts” and “Vedic literature” include Purāṇas); Steven Rosen: *The Lives of the Vaishnava Saints. Shrinivas Acharya, Narottam Das Thakur, Shyamananda Pandit*. [New York] (Folk Books) 1991, p.9 (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is an example of “earlier Vedic texts”, which raises the interesting question of what later texts of this category would be).

<sup>75</sup> *Vaiṣṇavism* (see note 3), p.10.

<sup>76</sup> Op.cit., p.9.

<sup>77</sup> This is a complex problem. Elkman’s view seems to be in disagreement with the statements of Sudesh Narang: *The Vaisnava Philosophy (according to Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa [sic])*. Delhi (Nag Publishers) 1984, pp.42-47. According to the latter work, Baladeva’s views are in accord with those of Jīva.

**BĀBĀ PREMĀNANDA BHĀRATĪ (1857–1914),  
AN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY ENCOUNTER  
OF VAIṢṆAVA DEVOTION WITH AMERICAN CULTURE:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY\***

Gerald T. Carney

---

**HINDU BABA COMES HERE**

---

His Mission is to Convert the United  
States to the Worship of Krishna.<sup>1</sup>

---

**T**his headline from the *New York Times* is not from September 19, 1965, the date of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami's landing in America, but from October 16, 1902, the day following the arrival of Bābā Premānanda Bhāratī at New York on the liner Oceanic. This early missionary of Vaiṣṇava devotion, who published a successful book entitled *Sree Krishna, the Lord of Love*,<sup>2</sup> established the first Krishna temple in the United States, and issued a periodical called *Light of India*,<sup>3</sup> is now largely forgotten. However, his career represents an important, and particularly interesting, chapter in the history of the mediation of Indian culture to the West. Devotion to Krishna had been preached in the United States in the early years of the twentieth century, his praise chanted, and the skepticism of American culture challenged. Consideration of this earlier exponent of Vaiṣṇavism does not cast a shadow on the later mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda so much as it permits these two Caitanyaite bhaktas to be seen in a comparative light.

### Bābā Bhārati's Arrival in New York

At least three New York papers, the *Times*, *Herald*, and *Tribune*, in their issues of October 16, 1902, covered the arrival of Bābā Bhārati on the Oceanic the previous day. These stories are a colorful mix of information and misinformation. The longest was in the *Tribune* and included a studio photograph of the turbaned, long-haired Bābā, wearing a kurta and tulsi beads around his neck. The *Tribune* describes him as "nearly, if not quite, six feet high, and of a solid build. His face is mobile and full, as his portrait indicates." The *Times* says he is "a big man, over six feet in height, and he wears the conventional black clerical garb, with the exception of a light yellow silk turban, which rendered him conspicuous among the crowd on the pier." The *Tribune* adds, "Premāndand Bhārati [sic], with the exception of a cream yellow silk turban, wore the conventional clothing of the Anglo-Saxon. He brought with him, however, the robe which his sect wears, and which is shown in his portrait. He expects to wear this when he reaches Chicago. The beads which appear on his neck are used much as the Catholic uses his beads. The monks are constantly telling their beads, he said."<sup>4</sup>

All of the stories mention Chicago. In explaining his plans to the *Tribune*, he is quoted as saying: "We have about fifty converts in this country. Four or five of these are in Chicago, where I shall begin my work, and where I shall go in about a week. In New York there are no converts. I shall return here to open classes and to lecture about Christmastime. Classes are being arranged for me in Chicago." The *Times* adds that, after returning to New York, he would "remain here six months doing the same work." There is no indication that the intended trip to Chicago took place (the publication of a lengthy story by him in the *Herald* on November 23, 1902 seems to argue against it), nor any information about the identity of the "converts" there. There are reports that Bābā Bhārati had met with Swami Vivekānanda in India and may have received the names of some contacts from him.

The nature of his religious message got particularly garbled in the *Herald*, which has him arriving "from Asia to make converts to his sect of Buddhism." Further mixing things, the story continues, "His sect, which is a branch of Buddhism, believes that Krishna is the reincarnation of God and was born 5,000 years ago." The *Times* is more accurate, calling him a "missionary of the Vaishnava religion, a religion based on the Vedas," and quoting the Bābā as saying, "We worship Krishna. Krishna was born 5,000 years ago, and is a perfect incarnation of God." About himself, the stories note

that he had been a journalist, but “he received a call and is now engaged in the propagation of his religion outside his native land” (*Times*). He identified himself with the “monastery of Muttra” (*Times*) or “the monks who live around Rhadakund [sic]” (*Tribune*).

I have been sent out to the West by the monks who live around Rhadakund, in the holy land of India, Brindaband. Brindaband, you know, has an area of about 162 square miles. It was here that Sri (holy or glory) Krishna was incarnated about five thousand years ago, and performed his miracles. The monks who are hermits, and of whom there are about 100, live around the lake Rhadakund. Rhadakund signifies love. Rhadakund was a maiden. She, as did other maidens, loved Krishna. Her love was purer than any of the others. She and her handmaids dug this pond and filled it with water drawn from a pond created by Krishna by means of a miracle. When Krishna discovered what she had done, she [?] blessed it, and thereafter people went to it to dip. (*Tribune*)

There is considerable discussion in both the *Tribune* and the *Times* about the non-violent character of these “monks”:

These monks, who live around the pond, are almost divine, they are divine. They think of nothing but love. They return good for evil. If any one should strike them, they would show no resentment. They carry no weapons except a staff, and that they carry to drive the monkeys away. (*Tribune*)<sup>5</sup>

All three stories touch on the manuscripts which the Bābā brought with him and the books which he planned to write. “I have brought with me many of the Scriptures in Sanskrit. From these I shall prepare a book on the religion and also another work which will be in the form of a novel, dealing with the mystics of the Himalayas. I may not be able to write as well as Rudyard Kipling, who got his information seventh or eighth hand, but it will be more accurate” (*Tribune*). The *Times* adds, “I have also written a book called ‘Impressions of London.’” While there are in fact only a few articles from the *Westminster Gazette* and several pieces on “The Baba in the West” in *Light of India* that give the Bābā’s rather critical impressions of London, he fulfilled both of his other objectives: *Sree Krishna, the Lord of Love* is a retelling of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with particular attention to Krishna-līlā in the second part; and the serial novel *Jim*, which appeared in the first two volumes



of *Light of India*, is a systematic refutation of the image of Indian religion and culture which Kipling created in *Kim*.<sup>6</sup>

### Life of Bābā Premānanda Bhārati

Surendranath Mukerji, the future Bābā Bhārati, was born in Dacca in 1858. His father, Abinashchandra Mukerji, was a deputy magistrate. His uncle, Onukul Chandra Mukerji, served as a judge on the Calcutta High Court. Surendranath studied at the University of Calcutta and pursued a career in journalism. In the early 1880s, he served on the editorial staff of the *Lahore Tribune*, a nationalist alternative to the *Civil and Military Gazette*, also published in Lahore. It was in this capacity as a journalist on a competing newspaper with a radically different editorial position that the young Mukerji came to know Kipling and to oppose everything he stood for.<sup>7</sup> He later worked for the *Punjab Times* and for *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. He is reported to have founded two short-lived papers at Lucknow, *The Oudh Times* and the *Indian Daily Mail*. He says, in the *Herald* essay, that he started "the first society paper in India," the *Gup and Gossip*, in Calcutta. Around 1890, he sought initiation from Brahmānanda Bhārati, a disciple of Lokanātha Brahmācārī, the Yogi of Baradi, and received the name Bābā Premānanda Bhārati. For about twelve years he was a wandering sadhu, spending much of his time at Rādhākūṇḍ in Braj.

It was at Rādhākūṇḍ that he had a vision sending him as a missionary to convert the "far West," in response to the many missionaries who had come to the "far East" to convert the "heathens." He first visited Paris and London. In London, he wrote a number of articles on Indian subjects (with a rare byline) for the *Westminster Gazette* during the coronation of Edward VII in 1902. He arrived in New York on October 15, 1902. The November 23rd spread in the *Herald*, then the "newspaper of record," was his first "break." On February 22, 1903, another *Herald* article was published, this one in the Sunday Literary Section, with the headline "Hindoo Propaganda Thrives: Growing Interest Among New York Christians in the Philosophy Taught by Two Indian Priests." The article treats Bābā Bhārati and the Vedānta Society representative in New York, Swami Abhedānanda. The article includes photographs which are captioned "Baba Bharati as he lived in the Indian jungles" and "Baba Bharati and his New York Students." The latter photo shows four women and one man with the Bābā, who is seated in the center. The article shows how far his mission had progressed in a few months.

Just across Broadway from Carnegie Hall, a few doors from the Grenoble Hotel, between two immense skyscrapers, was the other representative of Hindooism, teaching his classes. His name is Baba Bharata [sic], editor of a leading newspaper in Lahore and a fellow townsman of Kipling when he was editor in that famous city.

Baba Bharata is a man of wide reading and learning. He was twelve years with the holy ones in the jungles of India before he began his missionary work to convert Americans to Krishnu [sic], the god of Hindooism.

I found him seated at a table, his long black hair falling over his shoulders, dressed in a Yogi's garment reaching to the floor. His disciples sat around him. His discourse was exceedingly interesting as were his pupils—one a lady of perhaps thirty-five, one a young girl, another a college student, another a foreign agnostic, another a woman of middle age, apparently the mistress of ceremonies, who used her quick American wit in explaining what the missionary meant when unfolding some new problem in Hindoo philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

There is not much additional record of Bābā Bhārati's activities in New York, nor is there any indication of the nature of the organization he founded there called the "Krishna Samaj." Although he gave classes and many private talks, he did not do formal lecturing until the summer of 1904, when he was invited to take part in the programs at GreenAcre, in Eliot, Maine. As a result of this experience or of contacts made there, the Bābā transferred his activities to Boston. In early October, he attended an International Peace Conference where his speeches and appearance upstaged many of the official national representatives. As a result, he was seated as one of the vice-presidents of the conference. This prominent exposure launched him into Boston society. However, before leaving New York, he had seen the publication of *Sree Krishna, the Lord of Love*. The reviews of this work in the immediate aftermath of his Boston success were enthusiastic. The American *Review of Reviews* wrote:

One of the Orient's learned missionaries to the West, Baba Bharati, a distinguished Brahman of Calcutta, now lecturing in Boston (where he was recently elected vice-president of the Peace Conference), has written a book to interpret the Hindu belief as to the origin and meaning of life and the evolution of the universe. This volume, which is entitled "Sree Krishna, the Lord of Love" (published by the Krishna Samaj, New

York), is intended to be "the history of the universe from its birth to its dissolution." Baba Bharati has aimed to impress his readers with the substance of Hindu thought on religion and philosophy, in purely Eastern dress. The volume is really a clear history of the origin, nature, and evolution of the universe as the Oriental mind perceives it; it is a clear statement of the doctrine of Karma; an exposition of the caste system; a beautiful story of the Oriental Christ, and perhaps the clearest statement ever published of the Hindu cosmogony. Baba Bharati's style is direct, simple, and clear, and his thinking high and sane. It is a statement of a strong, manly believer in a philosophy and a set of ideals which, though they come from the pagan East, make a very strong appeal to the Occidental reader. The love of the source of the universe, which in the Hindu philosophy is Krishna, is the determining force of the universe. It is an extraordinary book—the fascinating exposition of an exalted philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

In August of 1905, Bābā Bhārātī was invited to participate in a Parliament of Religions and Summer Programs at Venice Auditorium, in Venice, near Los Angeles. In this resort setting, the Bābā shared the lecture platform with a number of leading exponents of New Thought, spiritualism, and esoteric Christianity.<sup>10</sup> He took up residence in a room in one of the towers of the Auditorium building, where he held classes and initiated interested students. The warm reception here led him to transfer his mission to Los Angeles from December 1905, after a two-month return visit to his Boston disciples. In March 1906, he founded the first Krishna Home at 730 West 18th Street in Los Angeles (a location which seems to have disappeared in modern freeway construction). There he conducted classes and lived with his students. In June 1906, the Bābā and the temple received a visit from the Mahārājā and Mahārāṇī of Baroda. In a departure from his previous practice, he began to advertise weekly public lectures on Sunday evenings. The first issue of *Light of India* was published in October 1906. In December 1906, Bābā Bhārātī engaged in a lengthy newspaper debate about the status of Indian women, an exchange which was partly occasioned by a letter to the *Los Angeles Herald* in early December. This defense included a general article on "Woman: East and West"<sup>11</sup> and two series of articles, one entitled "Peeps into the Purdah" on "The Hindoo Widow"<sup>12</sup> and "The Hindoo Wife,"<sup>13</sup> and the other devoted to refuting "Missionary Myths about Hindoo Women."<sup>14</sup> In July 1907, he announced his determination to return to India, after almost five years in the United States, to play a role in the movement of Indian nationalism.

With elaborate farewells, the Bābā left Los Angeles and proceeded to Seattle, with stops in San Francisco and Portland. He sailed for India from Seattle in September 1907, accompanied by six of his American disciples: Rose Reinhardt Anthon, Maud Lalita Johnson, Mary Walton, Emma Walton, Sophie Viollette, and William Lennox.<sup>15</sup> The interaction between this group and a party of Baptist missionaries bound for China was cause for considerable comment in later issues of *Light of India*. Along the way, Bābā Bhārati met with Indian students in Tokyo and Yokahama and contributed to some of their feelings of Indian nationalism. On arrival in Madras, the Bābā was introduced to an important lawyer, V. Krishnaswami Iyer, who sponsored two lectures (November 4-5, 1907) in Madras, the first of which concerned his experiences in America and the second, entitled "My Mission Abroad," which dealt with both religious and political subjects. This talk, which was widely reported in the English-language press,<sup>16</sup> provoked considerable controversy. The Anglo-Indian (pro-British) press took considerable pleasure in recounting the lecture. Among the native press, the moderate nationalists (including G.A. Natesan of the *Indian Review*) were sympathetic to his views, while the "extremist" papers (the *Hindu* of Madras, and *Bande Mataram* and the *Bengalee* in Calcutta) denounced the position that he had taken in terms of religious and political ideology. From this point on, Bābā Bhārati had greater support in Madras than in his native Bengal.

The Bābā's party, which received considerable acclaim because of the presence of his American disciples, made its way to Calcutta by November 15th, with stops at Rajahmundry and Puri, where the Bābā gave talks to enthusiastic crowds. Publication of *Light of India* resumed in January 1908, although the first issues detail some of the problems encountered in publishing it in India. The Bābā and his disciples toured India, visiting the Braj area in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, as well as Jaipur. There is little public notice of his activities since the strategy evolved in the United States of giving classes and public lectures does not seem to have worked in Calcutta. The Bābā apparently retained considerable public stature, since he was invited in April 1909 to participate as a representative of Vaiṣṇavism in a Convention of Religions in Calcutta under the sponsorship of the Rama-krishna Mission. By the start of 1910, he had resolved to return to the United States. In February and March 1910, he carried on an intensive lecturing program in Madras, under the sponsorship of V. Krishnaswami Iyer, now appointed a High Court Judge, and others of his supporters there.<sup>17</sup>

During this same period, G.A. Natesan and Co. (Madras) published the first edition of *Light on Life: A Selection of Five Spiritual Discourses*.<sup>18</sup> The farewell testimonials in Madras show the support he had in that city and reveal his hopes for this second American visit: the construction of a Krishna temple in Los Angeles and the recruitment of American women to participate in a program, called the Indo-American Zenana Mission, which would further the education of Indian women along traditional lines. His closest disciple and collaborator, Rose Reinhardt Anthon, remained in India to participate in this project.

The Bābā arrived in Seattle on June 3, 1910. By July 10th, he had returned to Los Angeles and had resumed his activities there. A new Krishna Home, although not the traditional Indian temple envisioned in some newspaper sketches, was founded at 1430 Dana Street in south-central Los Angeles, a building which was razed in the 1970s in order to expand the adjacent public schoolyard. A formal program of Sunday lectures at Symphony Hall was begun immediately, and *Light of India* (with a new title, *East and West*) began publication in November 1910. A lecture tour of the Atlantic coast is advertised in April 1911, but *East and West* apparently ceased publication with the May 1911 issue and the lecture announcements cease abruptly. There is no information about when Bābā Bhārati left Los Angeles and the United States. The obituary articles mention a second visit to England which may have taken place at this time. An article entitled, "How King George Could Win the Hearts of the Hindoos," appeared in the January 1912 number of *Nineteenth Century*<sup>19</sup> and provoked new controversy.<sup>20</sup> At some point in 1912 or 1913 he returned to Madras for a program supported by Justice Sundara Iyer, for V. Krishnaswami Iyer had died in early 1912. There are frequent references in *Light of India* to the Bābā's poor health. He suffered from diabetes and, after an extended illness, died of complications from this disease on January 24, 1914. A lengthy obituary article (with portrait), written by Rose Reinhardt Anthon, appeared in *The Indian Review* in February 1914.<sup>21</sup> A notice of his death appeared in the *New York Times* on February 21.

Bābā Bhārati's influence faded quickly after his death. J.N. Farquhar included him among the "Chaitanyas" under "Full Defense of the Old Religions" in *Modern Religious Movements in India*.<sup>22</sup> Wendell Thomas treats him in *Hinduism Invades America*:<sup>23</sup> "Baba Bharati's Krishna cult, which in America is now either defunct or very quiet, seems to be the oldest in America after Vedanta."<sup>24</sup> Bābā Bhārati was sufficiently prominent to

attract the attention of the cult watchers of the period.<sup>25</sup>

J. Gordon Melton included an entry on Bābā Bhārātī and the Krishna Samaj in his *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*,<sup>26</sup> which pointed to important connections with later groups. Rose Reinhardt Anthon was in India at least until 1914. The Natesan publishing house continued advertising *Light on Life* after Bābā Bhārātī's death and issued an expanded second edition (six lectures with an autobiographical sketch) around 1925. At that same time, Natesan republished the final part of *Sree Krishna* as *Sri Krishna's Messages and Revelations* "at the request of an American disciple of the Baba." This work was available at least until 1927.

Maud Lalita Johnson, one of the disciples who had accompanied Bābā Bhārātī to India in 1907 to 1910, dedicated her 1934 novel *Square* to him: "To Baba Premanand Bharati, who by his love, patience, and continued watchfulness has led me out of darkness into *Light*, out of weariness into *Rest*, out of confusion into *Understanding*, out of continuous striving into *Perfect Peace*. To him I give thanks."<sup>27</sup> The novel is the story of a spiritual quest to India which involves Krishna, a guru, and a character named Jimmy. Maud Johnson later published a book on spiritualist channeling (in which Krishna plays a big role) in association with "the Royal Order of Tibet," the organization of George Adamski, who later claimed flying saucer contacts.<sup>28</sup>

Elizabeth Delvine King (1858-1932) was briefly a disciple of Bābā Bhārātī in Los Angeles in 1906.<sup>29</sup> Though she was converted to a form of esoteric Christianity in 1907, she and successive leaders of the group she founded, called the Aum Temple of Universal Truth, maintained a reverence for Bābā Bhārātī as her first teacher. The group, under the direction of Nina Fern Dennison, established a center at Newberry Springs, California, which was finally closed as late as the 1990s by her husband, Quentin Dennison.<sup>30</sup> Although the basis of the group's teaching is esoteric Christianity, they identified that path with various aspects of the devotional path taught by Bābā Bhārātī to their founder. During the 1970s, the group published portions of *Sree Krishna*, the *Lord of Love* in their periodical, *AUM*, the *Cosmic Light* and advertised copies of photographs of "our beloved Baba Bharati" for sale. The group made several attempts, beginning in 1955, to make contact with Bābā Bhārātī's Indian roots. They were apparently unaware of his association with Rādhākunḍ (as mentioned in *Light of India*) when they made a trip to India in September 1973. "We had hoped to visit Vrindabon [sic] to find the monastery where Premanand Baba Bharati had taught and

where he had placed upon the altar there, a picture of our founder Elizabeth Delvine King."<sup>31</sup>

There are several references to Bābā Bhārati in Bengali biographies of other teachers. However, there does not appear to have been any extensive study of Bābā Bhārati's life and work. A significant focus of my current research is seeking descendants of his family in Calcutta and those of his prime supporters in Madras in the hope of locating correspondence, diaries, and other publications which are not found in library collections.

### An Autobiographical Sketch

Some insight into the biography of Bābā Bhārati can be gleaned from an extraordinary article that appeared in the New York *Herald* on Sunday, November 23, 1902, scarcely a month after his arrival in New York. This article was previewed in the *Evening Telegraph* (a co-owned paper with the *Herald*) on Friday, November 21, with the headline:

---

#### KIPLING'S "MAN OF THE JUNGLE" HERE

---

Hindoo Who Inspired Tale  
of Entrancing Adventures  
Apostle of "Love"

---

After recalling the recent arrival of Bābā Bhārati in New York "with the avowed purpose of converting the American nation to his faith," the article suggests the impact that he has been making in the New York area: "The various 'sermons' he has delivered from lecture platforms have been listened to by crowded houses, and many clergymen have been numbered among his audiences." Then, noting that "Baba Bharati is a typical high caste Hindoo—a Lama," and that before "devoting his life to religion he was a newspaper editor in the city of Lahore, a friend and admirer of Rudyard Kipling."<sup>32</sup> From this the article then takes a flying leap: "It is said that Baba is the original of Kipling's holy man in his story 'Kim' and it is in the city of Lahore that Kim joined the Lama of Thibet [sic] in his search

for a certain holy river.” Supporting its argument, the article continues:

Color is given to the supposition by the fact that Bharati, a man of education and influence, and a successful editor, suddenly resigned his position and joined the ecstatic followers of Krishna, a Hindoo deity, and retired to the wilderness, where he remained in holy meditation for twelve years.

Having proved to his followers that he was in earnest and having demonstrated his ability, he was directed to proceed to the Western world and begin missionary work. Accordingly he sailed for America. He speaks and writes English fluently, and in that respect has a great advantage over many Hindoos who have visited this country. Those who have heard his lectures are struck by his personal magnetism and much fascinated by his pleasing and picturesque method of delivery. He is a handsome man, tall, statuesque, dignified and dark. His large, black sparkling eyes pierce the soul, and you carry them with you when you go home.

The religion which he teaches is summed up in one word, “love.” He teaches anger to no man, no matter how great the provocation. Every act is preceded by asking a blessing, and every letter or manuscript is preceded by a little prayer written in Hindoo [sic, actually Bengali] at the top of the page.

[The article then puts in the plug for the Sunday *Herald*.] By special arrangement this extraordinary man writes the story of his life and faith for next Sunday’s *HERALD*. It is a strong story and gives an intimate view of what this strange man purposes doing with his religion in New York and in the Western world with his slogan cry of “Love to all men.”

The article itself covered the entire first page and half of the second in the Sunday *Herald*’s fifth section. An artist had gone to some pains to provide decoration around the entire article. The headline, against an Indian frieze motif, proclaims “A Kipling’s Lama Here Seeking Disciples.” A large print of the formal portrait published in the *Tribune* at his arrival is centered on the top half of the page. Below it there is a large drawing of *saṅkīrtana* (perhaps including Caitanya and Nityānanda), captioned “The Ecstatic Song and Dance of Devotees of Krishna, the Supreme Deity of the Hindoos.—The Mark on the Forehead Symbolizes the Lord’s Temple and Is Key To the Sect.” At the lower left corner there is a photograph of Bābā Bhārati



seated in the midst of four other turbaned Indian gentlemen, captioned "Baba Bharati, the Vaishnava Missionary and Disciples." On the second page, a headline states "'Love for All Men,' the Faith and Life of Baba Bharati." Across the page are illustrations of six avatāras of Vishnu: described as Matsya, the Fish; Vaman, the Dwarf; Parasu Ram, or God Exterminating the Kings for 21st Time; Balaram, a Joint Incarnation; Buddha in Meditation; Kalki, the Coming Incarnation."

The *Herald* devotes the entire text body of the article to the Bābā's description of his life and faith. He begins with the improbable transition from journalist to ascetic:

For journalism to asceticism is almost an impossible leap. It is like jumping from pole to pole. Journalism means putting the whole world into your mind; asceticism means thrusting the whole world out of it. Journalism involves a minute study of man and manners; asceticism teaches how best to wipe out their impressions. It is to dive beneath the surface of things to know their real causes and meanings, and the only way to dive is to forget the surface.

But a Vaishnava ascetic need not blot the world from his mind and necessarily repair to the jungles to perform his devotions. He finds Krishna, his Deity, present everywhere and lives in the light of his love. To him, without Krishna, the most densely populated city is a wilderness, and a bleak, wild stretch of waste a peopled New York.

He describes his birth in the midst of the Mutiny and emphasizes the high station of his family, his father a magistrate, and his uncle Onukul Chunder Mukerji a judge of the Calcutta High Court, "the highest civil appointment below the Viceroy."

All of the comparisons with Kipling demanded some explanation, so Bābā Bhārati gives one paragraph of praise (directly under the header, "Kipling's Great Work for India") and then undercuts the praise, if not against Kipling directly then against Western civilization in general.

Yet Mr. Kipling has done great work for India. What he has written no other European is able to present to the Western public with such clearness of expression and vividness of detail. Such wide mental grasp is only possible to a genius—which Kipling undoubtedly is. Both the West and the East ought to be grateful to him—the West especially, for no similar work has awakened such interest in men and things Hindoo, in

the Western mind, as "Kim."

That interest has produced a thirst for more knowledge of India, which, I hope, will sooner or later be satisfied. When that time comes the West will be perhaps rudely awakened from its pleasant dream that its civilization, born only yesterday, is all-powerful and is Westernizing the unprogressive Hindoo.

These European dreamers will awaken to find that all their so-called civilization of the Hindoo is but as a layer of moss upon rock. In the final test the moss will vanish, leaving the granite unchanged, eternal. The Hindoo and his spirituality are the same today as thousands of years ago. They have outlived Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans—their systems, governments, and religions. The Hindoos alone remain imperishable. The only hope for these so-called modern civilizations is in adopting the spirituality of the Hindoo. His vast, all pervading spiritual power is realized by all—by English and Americans alike.

The magnitude of this intense belief and the vitalizing life of the Hindoo religion is a concrete reality felt by every European when he first sets foot on Indian soil. The very atmosphere is impregnated with vitalizing currents of spirituality, for it is the only real lasting thing in the world. Your civilization, tall buildings, machinery and systems of government are but for a day—tomorrow they vanish! The spiritual remains forever. It is the unseen power that sways mankind and the universe.

He then describes his newspaper career with the Lahore *Tribune* and the *Punjab Times* and his founding of the *Gup and Gossip*, a society paper in Calcutta.

I was now very happy with my material prospects and surroundings, and my paper having become popular among both Anglo-Indians and Indians, I had some fans and name for myself, too.

But just at this time my religious instinct began to assert itself, and very soon it overcame my passion for journalism. I was witnessing a performance of "Chaitanya Lila" at the Star Theatre....

This indescribable, wondrous scene made a profound impression upon me. I had at last found my religion of love so hazily understood in boyhood, and I resolved to give my life to it. With this awakening, all attraction for things material left me, and in the depth of my heart flowed a

stream of nectar which every moment thrilled through my being.

"Krishna, my beloved!" I exclaimed within myself, "I am thine forever. Thou art the mystery of love, the universe is its expression, and Chaitanya their most merciful explanation. Merciful, O Lord, because Thou art Thy Chaitanya Thyself. Thou camest again as Thy own devotee to teach us the way to Thee."

He spent a few more anxious years in journalism before it became possible for him to renounce the world at the age of thirty-two.

I then went to my Gooroo, Srimad Brahmananda Bharati, and fell prostrate at his feet. He said: "Rise, my child, and be happy for aye, for thou art liberated from all pain and henceforth art wedded to eternal love. Thou art of Krishna, and Krishna is Love."

He was then taken by Brahmānanda Bhārātī to see *his* guru, the Yogi of Baradi, Lokanātha Brahmācārī:

He took me to his Gooroo, the great Jogee of Baradi, the perfect Jogee, whom I saw for the first time. He was about seven feet in height, of golden color, with long matted locks and the most handsome intellectual face. His two eyes shone with a piercing yet tranquil light, in which he read you like an open book. He told me my inmost thoughts and gave me his blessing. He was then 160 years of age. A few days after I left him he gave up his body, sitting on his haunches and telling people the exact hour he would go. He expired exactly at that time, without suffering from any disease or pain.

Following this encounter, which presumably took place near Dacca,

I then proceeded to the holy land of Vrindaban, about a thousand miles from there, on foot. It took me about two months to reach my destination, but it did not matter, for I was blessed—blessed at every step on my way. I saw Krishna in dreams, while awake and footing my way along, singing and dancing in his praise. He beckoned me, his most perfectly beautiful form dissolving, as it were, with his entrancing smile, his newest raincloud complexion illuminating the blue sky of Hindoostan with the effulgence of his halo....

Oh, the days and delights of that march to the Land of the Lord! What

would I not give to enjoy them again? I was in ecstasy! ecstasy! I lay on bare hard ground in those forests, with my head pillowed upon the roots of trees, and slept as never emperor or millionaire slept—slept like a baby, rising with the rosy morn, my spirit fresh and soaring as a lark, singing hymns to my Lord.

He wandered for ten years throughout northern India and then settled permanently at Rādhākūṇḍ for two years before leaving for the West. Among his “mystic” experiences, he tells of the man and woman who suddenly appeared in the midst of a forest bringing him food and of the yogi in the Himalayas who promised him protection from wild animals, and then told him, “Turn back and proceed to the forest of Vrindaban—that is your place.” He gives a glowing picture of the hermits living around Rādhākūṇḍ, who rise at four in the morning and spend their days in ecstatic chanting and dance, fasting until evening and then eating a small meal, resuming their dance until the early hours of the morning.

These hermits are the meekest people in the world. They are the real Christians of the type known in the days of the Saviour. If you abuse or wound them, no matter how painfully, to the last they bless you, not in the spirit of religious fanaticism, but out of the depths of their hearts. And while you persecute them, they pray God to put love into your heart. They have no property, except the scanty garments on their back, a drinking bowl which costs but a farthing and their rosary.

With these simple belongings they make vast journeys over India, winning the respect and love of all fair-minded men. It was with these holy ones that I spent my days in meditation and study of the spiritual life during twelve years of apprenticeship to a study of the faith. I am yet only one of their most unworthy servants.

He then tries to correct the earlier stories which associated him with a Buddhist sect and to show the meaning of worship of Krishna.

Put in a nutshell, that creed asks us all—of all races—to love that Incarnation of divine love itself—Sri Krishna—with a whole heart, as either a son or a servant or a friend or a wife. The human heart being habituated to this feeling of love, the practice is easy, and when the practice attains fruition by being developed into a natural feeling the highest blessedness is attained.

My humble mission is to offer it to the Western people to examine it. Whether they will accept it, if worthy of acceptance, is a matter which I leave to my Lord, Sri Krishna.

Another aspect of his work is to undo the "religious bigotry" which has "ruled the minds of the American people, both high and low—when they looked at non-Christian peoples through the eyes of prejudiced priests." He said that scholars had now made available the sacred texts which tell the story of Krishna whose image the Vaiṣṇavas daily serve with worship that shows their deep appreciation of the greatness of Krishna.

My chief object in writing this article is to ask the educated men of this country to study these "heathen" books, not only for their own benefit, but also for the benefit of the ignorant masses, from whose minds should be driven out once for all the notion instilled therein by some bigoted Christian missionaries that the Hindoos are hopeless idolators, who revel in thick ignorance of matters spiritual.

They need also to be told that they should not judge a foreigner prejudicially because he belongs to a different form of religion than that prevalent in this country; that if it be he who lives and acts like a Christian is a truer follower of Christ than one who only belongs to the Christian Church but who does not care to act up to Christian principles, the average Hindoo is more a Christian than a heathen; that, therefore, to send missionaries to India to spread the light of Christianity among the Hindoos is like carry coals to Newcastle; and, finally, that to baptize with Jordan water and kneel down and pray before a wooden cross is equivalent to worshipping the image of Krishna with incantations, flowers and Ganges water, as the Vaishnava does every day.

This last statement gives an important clarification to the meaning of "conversion" and "discipleship" in Bābā Bhārati's mission. He is first looking for "disciples" who repudiate the missionaries' condemnations of Hinduism, who have an appreciative understanding of the stories about Krishna and their significance for the Hindu, who recognize that worship of a Krishna image is not idolatry, and who have cultivated a wide understanding of divine love. This attitude would represent a major "conversion" of Americans into a people who will open their hearts and understand the beliefs of another people without prejudice. Of course, he is convinced that once Americans have tasted Krishna's love, they will readily enter more deeply

into that love, becoming Vaiṣṇavas in fact as they have become at heart.

### The Life of the Bābā's Disciples: "The Baba and the Krishna Home"

Some sense of the significance of being one of the Bābā's disciples comes across in an essay written by Adelia Bee Adams, one of the Bābā's followers who remained behind in Los Angeles. The article was directed to an Indian audience on the occasion of the Bābā's arrival there in 1907, and was later republished in *Light of India*.<sup>33</sup> The first part of the essay gives an account of the Bābā's coming to the United States, his basic teachings, and his move to California in late November 1905 after his previous enthusiastic reception at the Venice Parliament of Religions in August and September. In Los Angeles, in March of 1906, he founded the "Krishna Home" where he established a temple and prepared to launch the *Light of India* in October 1906.

Here, with a few students who clubbed expenses on the community plan, he formed an *Ashrama*—a retreat, where he could have his own Brahman-Hindoo food, "magnetized," both in the cooking and the eating, by devotional thoughts and chants, and where worship could be conducted all day long. Here he lived, an ascetic though a householder; the real Indian *gooroo* among his *chelas*. [166]

In this context, his students came to know him closely:

In his simple and intimate life there with them they had daily, almost hourly, privilege to know what manner of life he lived. The uniform sweetness of his character, his almost childlike candor in all his dealings with friends, united to a giant intellect and profound wisdom with a very human sympathy for the frailties of mankind, together with his untiring efforts to lead them into the changeless joys of a spiritual life, compel unqualified devotion in those who know him intimately. [166]

Adams describes the course of a day in the Krishna Home, which began at sunrise "with morning prayer, facing east. Later all joined in worship in the temple, situated at the rear of the building. Here the *gooroo* read and explained to his students the life of Krishna and His later and full Incarnation, Chaitanya." [167]

This morning worship often delayed breakfast until late in the day, for the Baba, besides having the usual Oriental disregard for time, would permit no idea of fixed regularity in domestic affairs to shorten the devotions; but it is the testimony of all who attended that such was their enjoyment of the exercises that even the "inner man" did not rebel at delayed refreshments.

At candle-light the *Arati*—the evening song of adoration—was sung as millions of Hindoos in India sing it daily, with ceremonies of waving lights etc. Then again reading and talks by the Baba, who often, to illustrate a point, entertained his *chelas* with interesting folk-stories of India, of which he seems to be an unlimited encyclopedia....

It has been the privilege of some of his students to hear the good *gooroo* recount and explain such poems as the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, which latter he read and translated directly from the Sanskrit. One who has not heard this great poem explained by such a scholarly and sympathetic native of the land of its origin can have no conception of its full beauty and meaning. [167]

The article gives an extensive description of the *pūjā* shrine at the Krishna Home, one that I have been able to confirm and supplement through contemporary photographs of the shrine.

In the little temple (which he hopes is the nucleus of a greater one) besides daily worship with the house students, he held regular weekly classes and gave public Sunday lectures. Here he set up a shrine, decked with symbolic pictures of Krishna, Rādhā, and Chaitanya, and with the brass candlesticks and various utensils for worship he had brought with him from India. Some of these are very old and have romantic histories. Among the relics still in the temple is a bottle of water from the sacred "Radhakund," also there are boxes containing powder of the sacred tulsi plant, dust from the ground which had been trod by the feet of the saints for ages, at sacred Brindaban, etc....

In the temple hangs a picture of his "grand-*gooroo*" (the spiritual teacher of his *gooroo* [elsewhere in the article identified as the Yogi of Bārādī]) and he never left the temple without prostrating in lowly reverence before this picture.

In the photograph, given to one of the Goswamis of Rādhāramaṇa Temple in Vrindaban by Bābā Bhārātī during a visit there, the temple is located in a

clapboard building, probably a shed or garage. The walls are bare boards, but there is a canopy of multicolored cloth over the shrine itself. The altar is covered with a Hari-nām chadar (a shawl with the divine names on it). In the center is a photograph of Lord Krishna playing the flute; on the right is a picture of Caitanya in the four-armed form; and on the left is another picture of Lord Krishna which is decorated with flowers.<sup>34</sup>

Bābā Bhārati had a reputation in India of being a powerful leader of *kīrtana*. Although the practice did not seem to be central to the life of the Krishna Home, it is clear that he taught his American disciples to participate in *kīrtana* and to sing *bhajans*. He composed some new tunes, based on his American experience, for traditional *bhajans*, a practice that got quite mixed reviews in the Madras press. His disciples' ability to sing *bhajans* was the object of much amazement and praise.

Literary work was one of the primary activities of the Krishna Home. The Bābā attracted a number of talented writers among his disciples. The most prolific was Rose Reinhardt Anthon, whose *Stories of India: Moral, Mystic, Spiritual and Romantic* was published in two editions.<sup>35</sup> Adelia Bee Adams gives a description of the Bābā's own writing:

Much of his literary work was done, at the home, while he sat (usually with his long-stemmed *hookah* beside him) under a spreading tree, on the lawn stretching between the house and the temple, where there were frequent interruptions by visitors—to whom he seldom denied himself. His students were always welcomed by him with affectionate, almost Bohemian, cordiality....

While enjoying the balmy California days on the lawn, besides doing much of the editorial work and other work for his magazine, which he managed almost unaided, he often wrote the story "Jim," frequently reading the chapters as they were written to students and other friends assembled round him. He had under way, also, two other books: a life of Sree Chaitanya, and a book giving a Hindoo's impressions of Western customs—for which the American publisher is now waiting. [169-70]

Among the distinguished visitors who made their way to the Krishna Home in June 1906 were the Mahārāja and Mahārāṇī of Baroda, who were on a tour of the United States during which their outspoken and critical comments aroused considerable ire in the east-coast press.

This article, written at a time when Bābā Bhārati was not expected to



return to the United States, by one who had not followed him to India, ends with a somewhat nostalgic tone.

Whatever may be the views of the majority regarding his philosophy, unquestionably the Baba's teachings have left an indelible impression in America. the world-old religion, from which he claims all religions have sprung, has spread like the banyan and become firmly rooted in Western soil. The Baba himself will long be remembered by many people in America as an ideal gentleman and an ideal priest. From many American hearts to-day, a wave of love is following the Hindoo ascetic across the waters; many Americans, learning of his departure from our shores, are saying: "We shall not soon look upon his like again." [171]

Clearly, the Krishna Home was an ashram, the home of the guru in which the students were being trained to practice a program of deity worship and to absorb the Vaiṣṇava scriptural and oral traditions. Much of the content of Bābā Bhārati's writings and talks attempted to connect his devotional beliefs with generic religious ideas that would be better known to the general public. There was no need to do that with these disciples, and the focus of the teachings is clearer, the practice more demanding, and the influence of the guru's personality more pronounced.

### Critical Questions for Comparison

"We shall not soon look upon his like again." Indeed more than fifty years would pass after the death of Bābā Bhārati before another Bengali Vaiṣṇava would achieve similar, even greater, standing in the American religious scene. By that time, the name of Bābā Bhārati would be all but forgotten. Nevertheless, there are a number of critical points at which these two figures can be compared. Comparison does not detract from the unique characteristics of an individual but shows them in higher relief. There is also the possibility of getting a better understanding of what brought the level of enduring success to Prabhupāda's mission, which did not happen in the case of Bābā Bhārati.

First, there are some significant similarities: both came to bring an uncompromising Caitanyaite Vaiṣṇava perspective against the materialist culture of the West; both founded temples and taught their disciples deity worship; both wrote books and distributed magazines; both returned to India with foreign disciples. But here the similarities end.

There are some rather important superficial differences. The first factor is that of health. Bābā Bhārati died long before reaching the age at which Śrīla Prabhupāda, with vigorous good health into his seventies, first came to the United States. Bābā's return to India in 1911 may have been due to the long-term effects of diabetes, which were to worsen during the rest of his life. There is frequent mention of overwork, exhaustion, and illness. Bābā Bhārati traveled back and forth between India and the United States, hoping that he would be stronger at the next destination. Another, related, factor was transportation. Although Śrīla Prabhupāda's first trip from India to New York was by tramp steamer, he was quickly habituated by his followers to airline travel. Bābā Bhārati's travel in the United States was by train. A trip to or from India took between several weeks and several months, depending on the stops and connections along the way. Hence the notion of a lecture tour was borrowed by Bābā Bhārati from the earlier visits of Swami Vivekānanda. This also explains the slow movement from New York to Boston and then to Los Angeles.

However, there are several far more significant differences. First, major changes had taken place in the composition of the American religious counterculture. The individuals to whom Bābā Bhārati preached were adherents of "New Thought" groups and others with interests in spiritualism, the occult, and esoteric Christianity. Many of those who expressed interest in him and his ideas were non-denominational Christians, often ministers, exploring religious boundaries. Śrīla Prabhupāda's original beat and hippie followers, like those who chanted with him in Tompkins Square Park, reflected a lost generation of alienated American youth who had been through the drug subculture.

Second, much of Bābā Bhārati's preaching was directed against an "other" constructed as the Christian missionary in India and the supercilious colonial administrator. Much of his rhetoric is determined by his opponents: it is anti-missionary, anti-colonial, anti-West. Bābā Bhārati's journey to America was motivated by religious and cultural opponents in India, the "churchianity" of the missionaries and their attempts to convert the "heathens," and the colonial confidence in the superiority of Western culture and education. His novel *Jim* is a total rejection of even the sympathetic colonial, symbolized in his journalist nemesis Rudyard Kipling and *Kim*. One of his most successful essays was entitled "The White Peril,"<sup>36</sup> a response to chauvinistic fears of a "Yellow Peril" or a "Tide of Turbans."

This article, arguing that the superior cultures of the Orient are under

siege by the spread of materialism under the colonial umbrella, came to the attention of Tolstoy, who had it translated into Russian and who wrote Bābā Bhārati enthusiastically of his pleasure in reading the piece. Both Bābā Bhārati and Śrīla Prabhupāda preached against the emptiness of Western materialistic culture. However, the Bābā was always fighting the anti-colonial battle, while Prabhupāda was working against the effects of emptiness in the individuals who gathered around him.

Third, this different focus of cultural mediation profoundly affected the work of these two Vaiṣṇava missionaries. As I mentioned earlier in connection with Bābā Bhārati's autobiographical sketch in the New York *Herald*, a major purpose of his work was cultural conversion, bringing a large segment of the American public to reject the missionary and colonial fictions of the "heathenism" and inferiority of Hinduism, and to give an appreciative understanding to his preaching of Krishna as deserving equal standing with Christian belief, to accept that the Vaiṣṇava is the true Christian. Moreover, many of the Bābā's essays are written in a form of generic religious language (e.g., "Have You Loved?" and "The Real, Real Life") which permitted him to draw the reader into serious discussion of religious questions, with the explicitly Hindu material only coming at the end. This strategy differs from Bābā Bhārati's training of his more formal disciples; it also differs radically from Prabhupāda's methods of scriptural commentary and chanting. While the Bābā expected some or many of those who heard him to become worshippers of Krishna, and accounts of his giving mantras to seekers during his first weeks in Los Angeles support this, such "conversion" did not bear the marks of exclusive commitment that characterized many of Prabhupāda's early disciples. There is a different model of religious conversion and discipleship at work here. Many of the practices taught by Prabhupāda were directly focused to undo the effects of the sixties drug culture and sexual revolution.

Fourth, the composition of the early disciples of these teachers was different, with most of Bābā Bhārati's disciples being women and most of Prabhupāda's men. Bābā Bhārati offered a group of women the opportunity to develop their creativity and to exercise leadership in ways that were not then open to most women. Being the "gooroo's chelas" was a path to freedom. Ironically, much of the Bābā's work in India was devoted to defending the traditional status of women. Indeed, the centrality of women's issues in Bābā Bhārati's work was manifest in his defense of the Hindu wife and widow against the missionary-inspired criticisms and in his

establishment of the Zenana Mission to accomplish the perhaps self-contradictory goals of Western education along traditional lines. Aside from enforcing firm standards of sexual morality among his followers, Śrīla Prabhupāda did not focus on women's issues, whether of the traditional or modern period.

Fifth, although both Bābā Bhārati and Śrīla Prabhupāda belonged to the English-medium educated elite, they essentially belonged to and related to different social classes. The Mukerjis were close to the centers of political and commercial power in colonial India. Bābā Bhārati cultivated his connections with the various princely families, both on their visits to the United States and during his return to India. His proposals for the education of Indian women, although they did have promise of universal literacy, were directed primarily to the cultural elite. Bābā Bhārati himself traveled with a British passport and was not included in the popular imagination with the "Hindoos" who aroused anti-immigration passions. Seattle newspapers of the Bābā's departure in September 1907 and return in June 1910 are a clear illustration of this. The Bābā is included among the dignitaries leaving on the *Minnesota*, along with various ambassadors and Secretary Taft; he is not associated with the "Hindoos" against whom the inhabitants of Bellingham (WA) had rioted and who were then seeking redress from the British consul and whose request for refuge in Canada was denied. On his return, Bābā Bhārati received favorable mention in the press while many of the Indian immigrants in steerage were detained and later returned to India. Śrīla Prabhupāda, by contrast, although from an educated and affluent background, identified himself with the social disaffection of his educated disciples from affluent homes. Changes had taken place not only in the counterculture but also in the immigration status of South Asians.

Sixth, Bābā Bhārati's career as a journalist and Vaiṣṇava missionary took place against the background of the Indian movement for independence. His anti-Western and anti-colonial critique had inevitable political implications, and many of his writings are explicitly concerned with political issues. The return to India in 1907 was motivated by a desire to play a role in advancing Indian cultural and religious nationalism, although the lack of a political agenda (and his rejection of agitation and violence) lost him the support of the Bengali "extremists" even as it won him loyalty among the Madras "moderate" Hindus. Bābā Bhārati's writings are deeply involved in questions of Indian religious and cultural identity and its relation to nation-

alism. Śrīla Prabhupāda came to the United States from an independent, secular India. Hinduism, during that particular moment (the 1960s), was perceived as a "religion," without political overtones. This view was reinforced by the "drop-out" tendency and disaffection with political action among many in the American counterculture. By contrast, a religious missionary from India today would again be forced to relate to the political dimensions of Hinduism both in India and in the Hindu diaspora.

Seventh, Bābā Bhārati's background as a journalist led him to write his book *Sree Krishna* as a popular treatment of Krishna for American audiences and to confront missionary prejudice with the novel *Jim* (his explicit critique of Kipling's *Kim*). While he taught the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to his disciples, nothing could be further from his intention than the elaborate translation and commentarial project which was undertaken by Prabhupāda. His role of cultural mediator was played out in a different fashion.

Finally, one of the most significant differences between these two instances of Vaiṣṇava missionary activity is rooted in none of these matters of cultural conflict, religious nationalism, and issues of social reform. Instead, it arises from the distinctly Indian phenomenon known as the *guru-paramparā*, the lineage in a particular religious tradition or *sampradāya*. Bābā Bhārati found his religious conversion in the individualistic—perhaps even eccentric—figures of Lokanātha Brahmācārī, the Yogi of Baradi, and Brahmānanda Bhārati. Most of his religious practice was carried out preaching and leading *saṅkīrtan* and, later, as an ascetic around Rādhākuṇḍ. While he received a mission to the "far West," there was no organizational model for the realization of this mission, even though the Krishna Home provided a kind of traditional-but-untraditional ashram for his students.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, Śrīla Prabhupāda grew religiously in the circles of the Gauḍīya Maṭh, which was founded to provide an enduring organizational form but especially to give a structure to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava religious practice, indeed to foster a kind of religious conversion and the subsequent living out of its religious implications both as householders and ascetics. His previous gurus had been distinguished by their books and commentaries which had served to revitalize and to propagate traditional teachings. Religious genius, even sanctity, grows rooted in its native soil; transplanted, it brings not only the roots but some of the soil as well. Some of the fundamental differences between Bābā Bhārati and Śrīla Prabhupāda, both in their styles and success, lie in the stages and forms of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism which nurtured

their respective religious transformations. Not surprisingly, the distinctive character of these Vaiṣṇava missions is found in the religious dynamics of India.

But, with all these differences, one can only marvel at the audacity of the religious commitment of these two Vaiṣṇava missionaries who, a half century apart, came to bring the love of Krishna to a Western audience.

### ENDNOTES

\*The research upon which this paper is based has been supported by the Committee for Professional Development at Hampden-Sydney College through summer research grants in 1989, 1990, 1994, and 1995, and through a sabbatical leave for research during academic year 1995-1996. I received major encouragement in focusing on the problem of religious biography from the directors and participants in the 1995 NEH Summer Seminar, "Hindu and Muslim: Rethinking Religious Boundaries in India." This paper represents a portion of a biography-in-progress of Bābā Bhārati. These materials should not be cited or used without permission of the author.

<sup>1</sup>Headline in the *New York Times* on October 16, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Published in New York by the Krishna Samaj in 1904, this book was widely and enthusiastically reviewed. An edition was distributed in India by G.A. Natesan (Madras) in 1908. The book was republished in London by William Rider and Co. in 1912.

<sup>3</sup>*Light of India* was published in Los Angeles from October 1906 to July 1907 and continued in Calcutta from January to May 1908. Renamed *East and West*, it was published in Los Angeles from November 1910 to May 1911.

<sup>4</sup>The picture in the *Tribune* shows tulsi beads around his throat, not the japa-mala described in the article. Other portraits show him wearing the japa-mala around his neck as well.

<sup>5</sup>The *Times* pushes the monks' docility still further: I "am now connected with the monastery at Muttra, and have been sent out here by the monks. The people there are very good and humble. Strike them and they will smile, steal from them and they will bless you. They haven't much to steal, for all they carry is a stick to protect themselves from the monkeys." The *Times* concludes its story with the line, "The Baba is a vegetarian, and in his monastery the monks eat but once a day, at 8 o'clock in the evening."

<sup>6</sup>I have compared these works in a paper, "Kim and Jim: Two Images of Indian Religion and Culture during the Colonial Period," which was published in the *Annals of the Southeast Conference of Asian Studies* (1989), 91-112.

<sup>7</sup>The exact chronology here is unclear since neither the *Tribune* or the *C&M Gazette*

used mastheads or regular bylines. Rudyard Kipling served on the *Gazette* from 1882 to 1887 and as assistant editor of the *Pioneer* from 1887 to 1889. The *Tribune* was founded in 1881 with a largely Bengali staff.

<sup>8</sup>The rest of the article is concerned with the Bābā's explanation of the status of women in India and, in particular, his explanation of the practice of *sati*. One of Bābā Bhārati's preoccupations throughout his career was defending the status of women in traditional Hinduism against the criticisms brought forward by missionaries and social reformers. However, his later advocacy of a traditional education for Indian women along national lines seems to combine two incompatible goals.

<sup>9</sup>*Monthly Review of Reviews* 31 (February 1905), 255.

<sup>10</sup>I treated this period of Bābā Bhārati's work in a paper, "Bābā Bhārati: A Bengali Vaiṣṇava in Los Angeles," presented at the 1988 meeting of the College Theology Society at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

<sup>11</sup>Republished in *Light of India* 1/4 (January 1907), 134-35.

<sup>12</sup>Republished in *Light of India* 1/3 (December 1906), 77-80.

<sup>13</sup>Republished in *Light of India* 1/5 (February 1907), 157-65.

<sup>14</sup>Republished in *Light of India* 1/4 (January 1907) 136-39; 1/5 (February 1907), 169-71; 1/6 (March 1907), 206-7.

<sup>15</sup>This list is included in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* of 9/11/07

<sup>16</sup>A long article appeared in the *Madras Mail* on November 6, 1907; republished in *Light of India* 2/1 (January 1908), 37-39. The Bābā gives his own reflections on the spirited event in his column "Paragraphs on Passing Events," *Light of India* 2/5 (May 1908), 221-24. These two accounts differ in that the *Madras Mail* gives considerably more attention to the political material while Bābā Bhārati himself gives greater emphasis to the religious material. I have treated these talks and Bābā Bhārati's other political writings in a paper entitled "Echoes of a Future: Bābā Bhārati on World Affairs and Indian Nationalism," presented at the 1993 meeting of the Southeast Conference of Asian Studies.

<sup>17</sup>An account of this activity was published in a book entitled *Baba Bharati in Madras* by G.C. Loganathan Bros., Madras, in 1913. (No copy of this book has yet been located.)

<sup>18</sup>This work is a republishing of five talks which had appeared in *Light of India* and had been privately published by the Indo-American Publishing Co. in Calcutta as *American Lectures*. *Light on Life* was republished around 1925 in a second edition which included an "autobiographical sketch." (No copy of this second edition has yet been located.)

<sup>19</sup>*Nineteenth Century* 71 (January 1912), 58-74.

<sup>20</sup>To date I have been unable to document the reports of extensive discussion of

this article in contemporary London papers. However, there are selective responses to it in the Anglo-Indian *Times of India* (1/24/12) p. 9 and in the moderate *The Indian Review* (edited by Bābā Bhārati's friend G.A. Natesan) 13/2 (February 1912), 181.

<sup>21</sup>*The Indian Review* 15/2 (February 1914), 111-14.

<sup>22</sup>Lectures from 1914, republished by Munshiram Manoharlal in Delhi, 1967, p. 296.

<sup>23</sup>(New York: Beacon Press, 1930), pp. 177, 218.

<sup>24</sup>p. 177.

<sup>25</sup>For example, Mersene Elon Sloan, *The Indian Menace* (Washington: The Way Press, 1929); Mabel Potter Daggett, "The Heathen Invasion," *Hampton Columbian Magazine* 27/4 (October 1911), 399-411 (and a letter supporting him by Elsa Barker on p. 722 of the December 1911 issue) and "The Heathen Invasion of America," *Missionary Review of the World* 25/3 (March 1912), 210-214 (and editorial, "The Heathenism in America").

<sup>26</sup>J. Gordon Melton, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 3rd edition (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989), pp. 164, 870 (entry 1382). The content of these entries is unchanged in the most recent, 4th edition.

<sup>27</sup>Lalita [Maud Lalita Johnson], *Square* (Laguna Beach: Order of Loving Service, 1934).

<sup>28</sup>Latoo—the Instrument, Lalita—the Recorder [copyright by Maud Lalita Johnson], *Transmitted Light* (Laguna Beach: Order of Loving Service, 1937).

<sup>29</sup>See entry in Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, p. 689 (entry 1036).

<sup>30</sup>Gordon Melton and I met Mr. Dennison in June 1990. I am grateful to him for copies of the periodical, for some photographs of Bābā Bhārati, and for a signed copy of *Sree Krishna*.

<sup>31</sup>AUM, *The Cosmic Light* #1 (December 1973), 27.

<sup>32</sup>This misapprehension of Bābā Bhārati's relationship with Kipling he allows to stand, although he damns Kipling with faint praise in the autobiographical sketch.

<sup>33</sup>Adelia Bee Adams, "The Baba and the Krishna Home," *Light of India* 2 (April 1908), 163-71. Page references in the text are to this article. The article was previously published in the *Indian Mirror*.

<sup>34</sup>I am grateful to Padma Nabh Gosvami for making the photograph available to me from the collection of his father. There is a close similarity between this shrine and descriptions of the early *pūjā* shrines set up by Śrīla Prabhupāda in New York, especially in the use of photographs rather than metal or stone images.

<sup>35</sup>The first edition was published in Los Angeles at the Times-Mirror Press in 1906; an expanded edition was published in London by William Heinemann in



1913. She is also credited as co-author (with Mary Walton) of *Glimpses of India*, but this book has not yet been located.

<sup>36</sup>"The White Peril," *Light of India* 1/2(November 1906), 41-48.

<sup>37</sup>A comparison of the activities of Bābā Bhārati with those of his contemporary Ramakrishna Vedanta Society swamis in New York or San Francisco shows the impact which the existence of a monastic order had on the endurance of that movement.

## HAS ISKCON ANYTHING TO OFFER CHRISTIANITY THEOLOGICALLY?

Kenneth Rose

### Introduction

In the summer of 1970, I entered ISKCON as a disillusioned nineteen-year-old Roman Catholic seeking to deepen my devotion to God, to Krishna. I remained in the Krishna consciousness movement a year and a half and was initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda, the movement's founder. I left the movement at the beginning of 1972 in order to fully commit myself to the practice and study of Christianity. It is from this perspective that I approach the question: Has ISKCON anything to offer Christianity theologically?

My central theological interest is the construction of a global systematic, or dogmatic, theology out of the diverse materials of the religious traditions of the world. God, I believe, is the source of these traditions, yet the knowledge of God and of God's saving activities is not exhausted by these traditions. For this reason, I believe that an adequate theology must be global; it must be a sustained and universally receptive effort of what Gordon D. Kaufman (1981:12) has called "constructing toward God."

My theological position is itself an attempt toward such construction. My essentially orthodox Christian theological outlook, nurtured by both Roman Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism, has, over the years, been challenged to critical reformulation by the lingering influence of my intensive experience as an American Vaiṣṇava. Although I left ISKCON twenty-five years ago, some of the central images and doctrines of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism it propagates still remain as lively theological truths for me. It is these elements of Vaiṣṇavism, above all other factors, that have prevented me from remaining a traditionally orthodox Christian. The formative influence upon me of the vibrant piety of ISKCON has for a long time challenged me to attempt the construction of a dogmatic theology that is sensitive to both traditional Christian piety and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. In the following

pages I will take a preliminary step toward global dogmatic construction that is sensitive to what the Vaiṣṇavism of ISKCON has to offer to Christianity theologically with respect to three central theological categories: Revelation, God, and Eschatology.

### I. Revelation

With the exception of Evangelical Protestantism,<sup>1</sup> Christian openness to other religions has steadily increased over the course of the past century. The arrogance that allowed Monier Monier-Williams (1890:185) to assert in the late nineteenth century that the people of India will find "in Christianity alone their true home" has become muted. Among mainstream Protestants the quaint claim made by Rudolf Otto in 1930 (p. 104) that "Christianity is the religion of the conscience *per substantiam*, bhakti-religion that religion *per accidens*" would be indulged with a wry skepticism. And the charges brought against the worship of Krishna in 1915 by Nicol MacNicol (1968:264) that it is "incurably idolatrous," "sensuous," "nature-worship," "lacking a content of revelation," would be discounted as the tendentious misjudgments of a missionary propagandist.

In place of these dated opinions, contemporary liberal Protestants might adduce more enlightened sentiments. For example, a current Protestant student of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, John Carman, believes that because of the deep similarity of the Christian and Śrīvaiṣṇava traditions with respect to the tension between God's sovereignty and accessibility, Christians are able to appreciate the writings of Śrīvaiṣṇavism's outstanding theologian, Rāmānuja. And so, in place of the missionary triumphalism that marred earlier Christian explorations of Vaiṣṇavism, Professor Carman (1974:271), in a gracious display of Christian humility, closes his book on Rāmānuja by suggesting that the "significance of this understanding poses an important and as yet unresolved question for Christian theology." For me, this unresolved question takes the form: What can Christian theology learn from Vaiṣṇavism in general and from ISKCON in particular?

Despite the openness of mainstream Christianity to other religious traditions, a residue of exclusivism remains. This is evident in a recent book by a Roman Catholic theologian, Aylward Shorter, in which an expansive generosity toward non-Christian religions is given expression. "There is no doubt," writes Shorter (1983:172), "about the current teaching of the Catholic Church that God's universal salvific will is effective and that every human being is given a chance of salvation. Grace is offered to all." Shor-

ter quickly points out, however, that this universal opportunity for salvation is predicated upon the saving death of Jesus Christ, as the Vatican II document *Gaudium Et Spes* proclaims. It was the linking of the notion of universal opportunity for salvation with that of Christ's own redemptive work that earlier gave rise to Rahner's (1975:214) theory of "anonymous Christians." The logical contortions evident in this concept are indicative of a desire not only to generously include all human beings within God's saving providence but also of a desire to maintain the decisive primacy of the Christian revelation.

Despite the latitudinarianism of Rahner's and Shorter's position, it is still ultimately a Christ-centered exclusivism, and it seems incapable of becoming broad enough to fully appreciate that the irenic exclusivism it exemplifies is also a feature of some non-Christian religions and of ISKCON Vaiṣṇavism in particular. For example, where some irenic Christian might assert that ultimately all redemption, including that which is discovered through non-Christian religions, is made possible by Christ, Prabhupāda, following the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.8), would trace all salvation to Śrī Krishna, who is "the fountainhead of all *avatāras*" (Bhaktivedanta, 1983:229). And contrary to the Christian belief that the Biblical record affords the deepest insight into the divine truth available to humanity, Prabhupāda (*ibid.*:36) claims that,

One will find in the *Bhagavad-gītā* all that is contained in other scriptures, but the reader will also find things which are not to be found elsewhere. That is the specific standard of the *Gītā*. It is the perfect theistic science because it is directly spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

On the basis of these and many other passages in Prabhupāda's writings, it is quite conceivable that in dealing with the problem of other religious traditions, some Vaiṣṇava theologian might begin speaking of the devout of other faiths as "anonymous Vaiṣṇavas." Something like this is implicit, in fact, in Prabhupāda's frequently repeated claim that all creatures, whether or not they acknowledge it, are eternal servitors of Lord Krishna (Bhaktivedanta, 1974:55).

In the face of this ISKCON Vaiṣṇava claim to ultimacy for Krishna and His revelation, three courses of thought and action are open for Christian theology: We can repress the Vaiṣṇava claim to ultimacy; we can acquiesce in it and become disciples of Krishna's representatives; or we can attempt

the construction of a systematic theology that will, on the basis of these two ultimates, Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism, articulate the essential doctrines of a general theism that endeavors to coherently explicate the theological insights contained in these two diverse and equally rich and philosophically defensible revelation traditions.<sup>2</sup>

To take the first alternative—repression—would be a futile, unreasonable course, for it simply denies what is obvious: the self-sufficiency of a non-Christian religion to abide faithfully in the presence of a redeeming, self-revealing God of love. The second alternative—acquiescence—seems unlikely, for just as Vaiṣṇavism has a rich heritage of revelation and devout practice to lovingly maintain and proclaim, so does Christianity. It is for these reasons that I have decided on the third alternative: that of learning from one another about the ways of God in our respective traditions. Beginning with our very different revelation traditions, we can start constructing a general theological picture of reality that may be more adequate theoretically than that which is provided by either tradition on its own. But to do this demands the humility that recognizes that God may have spoken, through a tradition alien to ours, truths that can supplement what God has spoken in our own tradition. If this were all that Christianity were to learn in its encounter with ISKCON, that would be valuable and significant. But, as the following discussion will attempt to show, there is much more than this to be learned by Christianity in its encounter with ISKCON.<sup>3</sup>

## II. God

Carl Raschke, a theologian attempting to apply the deconstruction of Derrida to theological discourse, asserts (Altizer, Myers, et. al., 1982:4) that “neither language nor human self-awareness conceals any thread of reference to things as they are.” Basically, Raschke is denying predication, that which makes thought and language possible (Peukert, 1984:131-132). This extreme negation of the capacity of discourse to capture in concepts and words features of extrasubjective reality is hermeneutical nihilism. It implies not only the undermining of the persistent regularities that ground science and philosophy but also of those that ground theology.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the sensation of novelty that attends deconstruction, it is not essentially a new method; indeed, it seems to me to be just a reformulation of the apophatic, or negative, method in theology and philosophy. In Dionysius the Areopagite,<sup>5</sup> for example, the negative method of theology

is pushed to the extreme in the denial that the predicative capacity of discourse can be applied successfully to God. The result of this radical apophaticism is that knowledge of God is thought to be forever beyond the reach of reason. Such a negative tendency, if it is not dialectically checked by a cataphatic, or positive, method—in which the capacity of thought and language to attain to knowledge of God is maintained—foretells the ultimate destruction of theism.

In the West, the most sublime dialectical balance between apophatic and cataphatic theologies was achieved by St. Thomas Aquinas. Because human beings, in Thomas's view, are related to God as effects to their cause, whatever perfections are to be found in human beings must pre-exist superexcellently in God. Consequently, human discourse about the perfections of human existence, personality, goodness, and so forth, must in some degree be predicable of God. On this view the extremes of either a purely negative or a purely positive theology are ruled out. Theological discourse must be a mean between these two methods. In other words, knowledge of God is based on the belief that the being of God is like, yet unlike, that of human beings.<sup>6</sup> This mediating method is a form of analogical reasoning (*Summa Theologica*, I.13, 5).

In the East, a formally similar dialectical balance between the apophatic and the cataphatic approaches was achieved by Śrī Caitanya in his doctrine of *acintya-bhedābheda*. Against the extreme monism of the Advaita-vādins (which, like Dionysius's apophaticism and deconstruction, involves an ultimate negation of predication [Kar, 1978:105]), Caitanya argued for the inconceivable, simultaneous oneness and difference of Krishna and finite creatures. In this view, we are one with Krishna insofar as we participate in Krishna's being, but we are different from Krishna insofar as we do so only finitely, and hence imperfectly.

The similarity of Caitanya's principle of *acintya-bhedābheda* and Thomas's principle of analogy will seem remarkable only if it is not understood that this logical similarity is a function of the logic of theism itself. Any theism that does not suppose that whatever perfections exist in creatures must first exist in their fullness in the Creator is logically incoherent.

It is precisely at this point that ISKCON can be of service to liberal Protestant theology, for the lingering fideism and biblicism of post-Barthian theology is still the source among liberal Protestants of a suspicion of philosophical theology of the sort pursued by Thomas. Consequently, among liberal Protestants the notion of a personal God has the status more

of a mere affirmation of faith than of a rationally justifiable metaphysical truth. But a theism of this sort is, in Prabhupāda's view, nothing more than sentimentalism.

The theism preached by ISKCON is, on the contrary, not a sentimental affirmation but a logical implication of the metaphysical axiom of inconceivable, simultaneous likeness and unlikeness. Consequently, it can offer a powerful logical defense against all forms of theological skepticism, whether derived from Derrida, Dionysius, or Śaṅkara. For these just-named thinkers, the formlessness of ultimate reality provides no foundation for form; to speak, therefore, about the personality of God, from this perspective, is ultimately to speak nonsense. A disastrous problem, however, is generated by this view: How, even as illusion, can the experience of form arise if there is absolutely no ground for it in reality? Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism avoids this problem because it argues, contrary to the above-stated impersonalist view, that if any finite entity possesses personality, it does so because it derives this attribute from its original cause, the all-attractive reservoir of all perfections, Lord Śrī Krishna.<sup>7</sup>

In bringing us to this point, Prabhupāda has brought us as far as Thomas had brought theology in a more philosophically acute age. Christian theology would do well to examine the rational foundations of theism as set forth by Vaiṣṇavism, for not only will it enable us to restore a neglected element of our tradition, but it can also help us probe into an area avoided by Christian theology. I am referring to the notion that God possesses an eternal form, a spiritual body.<sup>8</sup> Thomas outright rejects this notion on the grounds that it represents the projection by the imagination of corporeal form upon the incorporeal (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.20, 37). Actually, this rejection seems to violate the principles of analogy central to Thomas's thought, for if creatures have personality in virtue of God's personality, on what grounds will it be denied that this reasoning can be extended to also conclude that creatures possess bodies in virtue of God's possessing a body?

To those of us who have been nurtured within cultures shaped by the Bible, such reasoning is shocking and would likely be dismissed as childish nonsense.<sup>9</sup> If, however, on the basis of something like the anthropic principle in astronomical cosmology,<sup>10</sup> we were to understand universal evolution as intending the specific conditions necessary for human existence, then the notion that the human form is a material attempt to reflect the spiritual body of the ultimate personality, God, seems less nonsensical. Even from the standpoint of the Biblical writings, this idea cannot be dis-

missed, for, according to the apostle Paul, the destiny of the Christian is resurrection to a future life in a spiritual body that will be fashioned after the model of the "reanimated and glorified body of Jesus" (Wilhelm Pesch, in Bauer, 1981:84).<sup>11</sup>

The result of this preliminary study of the doctrine of God is, I believe, the discovery that ISKCON can help Christian theology to recover the metaphysical basis of theism and to enrich its understanding of embodiment.

### III. Eschatology

Above my desk at home are two prints. One of them, in a display of traditional Roman Catholic piety, depicts Jesus in agony upon the cross. Winged angels are collecting in golden chalices the saving blood flowing from his spiked hands. Mary Magdalen, crowned with a golden halo, is soaking a white cloth in the precious blood flowing from his spiked feet. It is a moment of supreme agony. Above this print, I have placed another one; it is one of the earliest and finest examples of the work of ISKCON's illustrators. Beneath a tree alive with exotic birds, in a verdant field decorated with wildflowers, and surrounded by placid peacocks, swans, and *surabhi* cows, stand Rādhā and Krishna in loving embrace. It is a moment of gracious delight.

When asked by friends why I have these prints placed on the wall like this, I explain that it is through the perpetual conversion of taking up our cross that we may begin to enter into the resurrection life in which all creatures will experience the perfection of personal and social fulfillment in the loving play of God. To my way of thinking, the cross is the way to the eternal kingdom of God, and the images provided by ISKCON of Krishna at play on His spiritual planet, Goloka Vṛndāvana, are the most suggestive intimations available to us of what God's kingdom will be like. Let me elaborate on this theme.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an emblem of hope. It is one of the most vital religious truths available to human beings, who are in all ways marked by limitation and death. It assures us that the deepest desires of our hearts for fulfillment, justice, healing, understanding, and love will not be finally and irrevocably defeated by nonbeing.

The Bible, however, gives only the scantiest picture of the kind of life that awaits those who are raised from the dead to dwell in the new Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>



And so my imagination is always leaping ahead of the spare Biblical vision of the resurrection life. In this leaping, my imagination and hope are aided by the rich pageantry of the pastimes in heavenly Vṇdāvana of Rādhā and Krishna and Their loving and playful entourage of friends and family. One of the most useful services that ISKCON, in its propagation of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, can render to Christian faith, hope, and knowledge is its providing rich emblems of the resurrection.<sup>13</sup> It can help us to visualize the perfection of personal spiritual existence that is God's promised restitution to a creation that has been marred by sin and death.

It is evident that no religious teaching that solves the problem of suffering by denying the ultimacy of personality can be a satisfactory or just answer to this problem. The human heart, both collective and individual, cries out not for the annihilation of hope but for its fulfillment. In his ardent defense of a personal God and of the persistence of the individual even in the state of liberation, Prabhupāda speaks powerfully to our hope of ultimate fulfillment beyond death. This fulfillment is not a private self-gratification, but is the bodying forth of the deepest hope of humankind: to live in peace and justice in a community centered upon the bountiful source of all that is good.

The emblem of Goloka Vṇdāvana is a revelation that God's power to make a world is not exhausted in the making of this material universe in which limitation and death are supreme. It tells us that God is able to bring us into a spiritual realm not marked by death and sin, where the Biblical promise "God shall wipe away all tears" (Rev. 21:4, KJV) shall be made good by the *rāsādi-vilāsi* (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā* 7.8), "enjoyer of the *rāsa* dance."

#### IV. Other Topics of Importance

The above discussion offers only an introductory glimpse into the possibilities of enrichment offered to Christian theology through a serious encounter with Caitanyite Vaiṣṇavism. Just as a great deal more remains to be said concerning the above theological categories *vis-a-vis* the two traditions, so also the dialogue between Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity needs to be pursued further with respect to various theoretical and practical issues of concern to both traditions.

One issue of particular interest to Vaiṣṇavas, for whom orthopraxis is prior to orthodoxy, is that of vegetarianism. The practice of *ahimsa* (nonvi-

olence) with respect to animals is central to ISKCON's ethical life. ISKCON devotees find the meat-eating of Christians to be a stumbling-block in the path of dialogue more serious than any theological issue. Christians, for the most part, find this issue to be of minimal importance. I am of the opinion that Christians have much to learn from Krishna's devotees on this issue. Christians can learn, without danger of pantheism, to cherish nonhuman life as also sharing in some way in the divine life. To learn this might deepen the dormant Christian reverence for nature. (For greater detail on this issue see my article "The Lion Shall Eat Straw Like the Ox: The Bible and Vegetarianism" [Rose, 1984]).

Another issue of great importance concerns the stages of relationality between the soul and God. The writings of such mystics and mystical writers as Jan Van Ruysbroeck, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and A. Poulain reveal the rich possibilities, within Christian experience, for intimate and diverse relationships with God, leading up even to the mystical marriage of the soul and God.

These possibilities, nevertheless, seem to have dropped out of the experience and conceptuality of contemporary Christians. Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, on the contrary, has maintained as its central object of contemplative practice the discovery of the individual soul's particular relationship with Krishna. Love for Krishna may develop in accordance with five basic *rasas*, or relationships: Krishna may be approached as the all-powerful Supreme Brahman, as master, as friend, as child, or as lover.

While this conceptuality may seem odd to the Christian at first glance, it has great humanizing power, for in upholding the just-named varieties of devotion to God (especially the last four), Vaiṣṇavism asserts the utterly personal character of the divine-human relationship—for what personalism could be content to dispense with these basic relationships that constitute personal existence?

Christian personalism, therefore, can be enriched through encounter with the variegated and highly articulated conception of the divine-human personal relation elaborated by Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. Perhaps Christians might even be moved to devoutly study the Christian classics of personalistic mysticism with an eye to the remedying of the current imbalance of Christian experience in the direction, on the one hand, of political and social activism without contemplation and, on the other, toward a relation to God that centers on God almost exclusively as saving lord and occasionally rises toward friendship.

### V. Conclusion

In Vaiṣṇavism, we who are Christians can discover a tradition, no less vivid and profound than Christianity, in which an absolute Providence is experienced in a variety of personal relationships, all of which are designed to restore to perfect loving fellowship in a blessed society those who respond to God's loving initiatives toward us. This discovery should persuade us to lay aside our proud and false claim of having, along with Judaism, the only direct historical and scriptural relationship with God.<sup>14</sup> The consequence of this divestiture need not be a skepticism that doubts the very possibility of revelation; on the contrary, the outcome should be that we will come to see that the Jewish-Christian history of salvation is an important strand in the garment of universal redemption that God is weaving—a garment that needs the contributions of Vaiṣṇavism as much as it requires the contributions of Christianity. This, I believe, is the most important lesson that Christianity can learn from Vaiṣṇavism and its Western representative, ISKCON.

### ENDNOTES

1. As late as 1974, in the Lausanne Covenant, Evangelical Christians formally rejected the belief that God may be known apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ: "We recognize that all men have some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature. But we deny that this can save, for men suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies." (Shorter, 1983:179) G. C. Berkouwer, a conservative Protestant theologian, looks upon extrabiblical religion not as revealed but as a "depraved answer to the revelation of God" (Dulles, 1983:7). In a daring break with Evangelical consensus, Charles H. Pinnock has granted that the general revelation alluded to in the Bible must be saving if it comes from a saving God [p. 7]. This is an encouraging step forward for Evangelical theology (Pinnock, 1984:7 and 1992).

2. For current studies of revelation by Christian theologians, see Dulles, 1983; Shorter, 1983; and Abraham, 1982. For a wide-ranging contemporary study of revelation in the Indian traditions, see Murty, 1959. For a sophisticated philosophical exploration of revelation from ninth-century India, see Jayanta Bhatta's *Nyāya-mañ-jari*, *Anhika IV* (1978:484-617).

3. A good example of a dialogic, constructive theology of the sort I am describing—and one that remains profoundly devotional—can be found in Thomas Merton's foreword to the first edition of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* (Bhaktivedanta, 1968:18-22). A careful study of that short essay will give some indication of how Christianity

can be enriched by its encounter with the Vaiṣṇavism preached by Prabhupāda and ISKCON. (Also see Paul F. Knitter's *No Other Name?* for a daring Roman Catholic attempt to move beyond Rahnerian inclusivism.)

4. This method immediately destroys itself, since denying the usefulness of predication is itself a negative predication.

5. Dionysius the Areopagite, or Pseudo-Dionysius, was most likely a late fifth-century Syrian mystic. Along with his other writings, *The Mystical Theology*, in which he gives expression in extremely daring form to a radical apophaticism, exerted a significant influence over subsequent mystical and dogmatic theology in the Eastern and Western Churches.

6. By means of his principle of analogy, Thomas (1947:1.158) is able to forcefully maintain the thesis that "the name *person* pre-eminently belongs to God" (*Summa Theologica* 1.29, 4). Thomas's argument is succinct and reminiscent of a similar argument that appears frequently in Prabhupāda's writings. "*Person*," writes Thomas, "signifies what is most perfect in all nature....Hence, since everything that is perfect must be attributed to God, forasmuch as His essence contains every perfection, this name *person* is fittingly applied to God" (*ibid.*).

7. Prabhupāda (Bhaktivedanta, 1973:99-100) uses a form of argument similar to Thomas's *analogia entis* where he states that,

The Māyāvādī philosophers cannot understand these two *prakṛtis*, or natures—material and spiritual—but one who is actually intelligent can understand them. Considering the many varieties and activities in material nature, why should the Māyāvādī philosophers deny the spiritual varieties of the spiritual world?...Māyāvādī philosophers, however, cannot clearly understand spiritual varieties; therefore they imagine a negation of the material world to be the spiritual world.

The latter sentence gives an example of negative theology unchecked by a positive theology. The first section of the above quotation is a good example of analogical reasoning; it maintains a dialectical balance between positive and negative predication. See also *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.24 and Prabhupāda's purport (Bhaktivedanta, 1983: 400-403). The implication of this verse is that personality (*vyaktim*) cannot arise from impersonality (*avyaktam*), since personality is of a higher ontological order than impersonality.

8. "The Supreme Personality of Godhead," writes Prabhupāda (Bhaktivedanta, 1973:100), "...has a spiritual body which is distinct from material bodies, and thus His name, abode, entourage and qualities are all spiritual."

9. The anthropomorphism of the older Biblical materials, especially the Yahwist sources, gradually gives way to the spiritualized (incorporeal) deity of the prophets and New Testament. Compare Genesis 3:8, Isaiah 40:18-20, and Romans I :22-23.

10. One form of the anthropic principle attempts to explain the unique factors

involved in the evolution of the universe by asserting that the universe evolved in such a way as to generate the conditions necessary to human life. This view is opposed to the more traditional view that life emerged as an accidental consequence of the coincidence of various conditions. For the mathematical, cosmological, and metaphysical arguments for the anthropic principle, see Gale, 1981.

11. See also Robinson, 1952:9; S. V. McCasland in IDB, 1962, vol. 1:452; E.W. Saunders in IDB Supplement, 1962:740; and Othmar Schilling in Bauer, 1981 759-763.

12. See Revelation 3:12, 21:1-22:5; and Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:17-25.

13. The following summary description of Goloka Vṛndāvana may be found in *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* (Bhaktivedanta, 1974:321):

In *Brahma-saṁhitā* the transcendental land of Vṛndāvana is described as being always spiritual. That spiritual land is populated by goddesses of fortune, who are known as *gopīs*. These are all beloved of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa is the only lover of all these *gopīs*. The trees of that land are *kalpa-vṛkṣa*, wish-fulfilling trees, and one can have anything he wants from them. The land is made of touchstone and water of nectar. In that land all speech is song, and all walking is dancing, and one's constant companion is the flute. Everything is self-luminous, just like the sun in this material world. The human form of life is meant for understanding this transcendental land of Vṛndāvana, and one who is fortunate should cultivate knowledge of Vṛndāvana and its residents. In that supreme abode are *surabhi* cows that overflow the land with milk. Since not even a moment there is misused, there is no past, present or future. An expansion of this Vṛndāvana, which is the supreme abode of Kṛṣṇa, is also present on this earth, and superior devotees worship it as the supreme abode. [i.e., Gokula Vṛndāvana, the Vṛndāvana that is in India, the earthly location of many of Krishna's terrestrial pastimes.]

This description of the perfections of Goloka Vṛndāvana calls to mind Thomas's theory of supereminence: God is the supereminent source of all perfections that are imperfectly experienced in this finite, sin-blasted world. "...God prepossesses in Himself," writes Thomas, "all the perfections of creatures, being Himself absolutely and universally perfect" (*Summa Theologica* 1.13, 2 [Thomas Aquinas, 1948:101]). "Hence, it is necessary that whatever is found to act in anything whatever must be found in God in a more eminent way than in the thing itself (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.28, 7 [Thomas Aquinas, 1975:136]).

For Prabhupāda's use of *emblem*, see Bhaktivedanta, 1974:326.

14. For current examples of Catholic and Protestant misunderstanding of the status of non-Biblical religions as bearers of divine revelation, see Dulles, 1983:175-76. Dulles writes that Eastern religions are not overtly revelational since they do not claim to be based on divine revelation. He generously allows for the possibility that

these non-Biblical religions might contain enough revelation to bring about the condemnation of their followers.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abraham, William J.

- 1982 *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism.*  
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Altizer, Thomas J. J. and Max A Myers, et. al.

- 1982 *Deconstruction and Theology.* New York: Crossroad.

Aquinas, Saint Thomas

- 1947 *Summa Theologica.* Trans. Fathers of the English  
Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers.  
1948 *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas.* (Selections from the  
*Summa Theologica.*) Ed., Anton C. Pegis. New York:  
Modern Library.  
1975 *Summa Contra Gentiles.* Trans., Anton C. Pegis. Notre  
Dame: University of Notre Dame.

Bauer, Johannes B., ed.

- 1981 *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology: The Complete*  
*Sacramentum Verbi.* New York: Crossroad.

Bhaktivedanta Swami, A. C.

- 1968 *The Bhagavad-gītā As It Is.* New York: Macmillan.  
1973 *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī*  
(translation), *Ādi-līlā*, Vol. 2., Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta  
Book Trust (BBT).  
1974 *Teachings of Lord Caitanya.* Los Angeles: BBT.  
1983 *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is.* Complete Edition. Los Angeles: BBT.

Bhatta, Jayanta

- 1978 *Nyāya-Maṅjarī: The Compendium of Indian Speculative Logic.*  
Volume 1. Trans. Janki Vallabha Bhattacharya. Delhi:  
Motilal Banarsidass.

Carman, John B.

- 1974 *The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious*  
*Understanding.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius)

- 1940 *The Divine Names and the Mystical Theology.* Trans. C. E.  
Rolt. London: SPCK

Dulles, Avery

- 1983 *Models of Revelation.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Gale, George

- 1981 "The Anthropic Principle." *Scientific American*  
245.6:154171.

## IDB

- 1962 *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.* (Four volumes and a supplementary volume.) Nashville: Abingdon.
- Kar, Bijayananda  
1978 *The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy: An Analytical Study.* Delhi: Ajanta Publications.
- Kaufman, Gordon D.  
1981 *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God.* Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Knitter, Paul F.  
1985 *No Other Name?* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis.
- MacNicol, Nicol  
1968 *Indian Theism: From the Vedic to the Muhammadan Period.* Second Edition. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Monier-Williams, Monier  
1890 *Hinduism.* London: SPCK.
- Murty, K. Satchidananda  
1959 *Reason and Revelation in Advaita Vedanta.* Waltair: Andhra University Press.
- Otto, Rudolf  
1980 *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity Compared and Contrasted.* Trans., F.H. Foster. New York: Macmillan.
- Peukert, Helmut  
1984 *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology.* Trans., James Bohman. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Pinnock, Clark H.  
1984 *The Scripture Principle.* New York: Harper and Row.  
1992 *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Rahner, Karl  
1975 *A Rahner Reader.* Ed. Gerald A. McCool. London: Dartmon, Longman and Todd.
- Robinson, J. A T.  
1952 *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology.* London: SCM Press.
- Rose, Kenneth  
1984 "The Lion Shall Eat Straw Like The Ox: The Bible and Vegetarianism," in *Back to Godhead*, Vol. 19, No. 11:8-11.
- Shorter, Aylward  
1983 *Revelation and its Interpretation.* London: Geoffrey Chapman.

## ISKCON'S LINK TO *SĀDHANA-BHAKTI* WITHIN THE CAITANYA VAISHNAVA TRADITION

Shukavak Das

As in the case of many religious traditions, Caitanya Vaishnavism<sup>1</sup> operates in two modes: an exoteric mode that is tailored to the needs of its general followers, and an esoteric mode that embodies the mystical aspects of the tradition and which ignites its spiritual inspiration. ISKCON, as a branch of Caitanya Vaishnavism, has inherited both, the basic process of *Vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* as well as the more esoteric *Rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. To date, however, the organization tends to emphasize *Vaidhī-bhakti*, and this because it was the emphasis of the movement's Founder-Ācārya and for practical reasons, discussed below.

For Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda three names stand out for their contributions to both of these religious moods. They are Rūpa Gosvāmī (1489-1564), Gopāla Guru (ca. 1550), and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī (ca. 1600). Rūpa Gosvāmī, of course, is most famous for creating the very foundations of devotional practice in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, but Gopāla Guru and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī are also important for their additions to Rūpa's system of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*.

It is not necessary for our purposes to describe the general details of *sādhana-bhakti*; suffice it to say that such *bhakti* may be divided into two divisions: *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* and *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*; and then there is *rāgātmikā-bhakti*, the spontaneous state of divine love, upon which a *rāgānugā-bhakta* models his devotion.<sup>2</sup> *Vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* forms the basis of the exoteric mode of devotional practice. It entails the following of a specific set of devotional rules.<sup>3</sup> *Rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* and *rāgātmikā-bhakti* form the basis of the esoteric mode of devotional practice. *Rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* involves following the moods of those who possess *rāgātmikā-bhakti*, or spontaneous love for God.<sup>4</sup>

Rūpa Gosvāmī's discussion on *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* has been most extensive, and, in general, Bhaktivinoda's interpretation of Rūpa Gosvāmī's system of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* is orthodox. He does, however, add to the dis-



cussion by stressing the importance of *varṇāśrama-dharma* in the practice of *sādhana-bhakti*. In general, Caitanya theologians such as Gopālaguru and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī give only limited attention to *sādhana-bhakti* and its relationship to *varṇāśrama-dharma*. Their focus was on the esoteric tradition of *Rāgānuṅgā-bhakti-sādhana*. No doubt the changes that had occurred in the lives of the *bhadralok*<sup>5</sup> during the nineteenth century and the misuse of *Rāgānuṅgā-bhakti-sādhana* by fringe groups of Vaishnavas demanded Bhaktivinoda's further commentary on *sādhana-bhakti* and society.

### Vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana and Varṇāśrama-dharma

Bhaktivinoda begins his explanation of *sādhana-bhakti* and society by stating that devotional practice ideally takes place within a supportive social and cultural environment—and the social and cultural environment that best supports that practice is *varṇāśrama-dharma*, or the system that regulates society according to *varṇas* and *āśramas*.<sup>6</sup> He says, “*Vaidha-bhaktas* should always try to bring their hearts to the lotus feet of Krishna while spending their lives situated in *varṇāśrama-dharma*. This is *bhakti-yoga*.”<sup>7</sup>

*Varṇāśrama-dharma* is the organization of society into four *varṇas* and four *āśramas* that was fashioned, according to Bhaktivinoda, by the ancient seers of India according to scientific principles. This is what he calls *vaijñānika varṇāśrama*, or scientific *varṇāśrama*. He writes: “Truly, all sympathetic and scientific-minded persons will agree that social rules reached their climax at the hands of the *ṛṣis*, who, with scientific understanding, divided the rules of society in a two-fold way: according to *varṇa* and according to *āśrama*.”<sup>8</sup> The *varṇas* were established in accordance with an individual's nature (*svabhāva*) and the *āśramas* were established with respect to an individual's relationship to society.<sup>9</sup> The system of *varṇas* and *āśramas* that Bhaktivinoda refers to, however, is not the traditional caste system of his time. In his opinion, the existing caste system was only a remnant of that ancient and scientific *vaijñānika varṇāśrama* system.

Bhaktivinoda was critical of the prevailing caste system, particularly over the issue of birth as the selective criterion of *varṇa*. He equates this form of *varṇāśrama* with *smārta-dharma*, or socio-economic religion.<sup>10</sup> He points out that originally the system of *varṇāśrama* was based on scientific principles, but gradually, from the time of Jamadagni and Paraśurāma, it deviated from its original purpose. The present-day caste system, he said, is a corrupted facsimile of that originally pure and scientific *varṇāśrama-dharma*.

Bhaktivinoda goes on to note that there is a natural system of *varṇāśrama*

that functions within all human societies, which he describes with the following example:

Those who have the nature of traders are fond of trading and thereby advance themselves by trade. Those who have the nature of *Kshatriyas* adopt the military life, and those who have the nature of *śūdras* love doing menial service.<sup>11</sup>

In its broadest sense, therefore, *varṇāśrama* is the system of rules of civilized life that pertain to physical, intellectual, social, and religious development. Every culture and society have a set of rules to regulate most aspects of the civic and personal lives of its participants, including those governing bodily hygiene, child education, criminal law, religion, and so on.

What Bhaktivinoda calls scientific (*vaijñānika*) *varṇāśrama* is the original Vedic *varṇāśrama-dharma*, which he says differs significantly from both the natural *varṇāśrama* that exists in human society in general and the prevailing caste system, based on *smārta-dharma*, that exists in India. The most distinguishing feature of Vedic *varṇāśrama*, according to Bhaktivinoda, is that *varṇa* selection was not based on birth but on the psychological makeup and qualifications of the individual. In Vedic *varṇāśrama* the natural *varṇas* and *āśramas* are scientifically delineated and combined to create a complex and highly specialized social system where the rules of society are directed not only towards its material advancement, but, most importantly, towards its spiritual and devotional development. In this way, the idealized original Vedic or *vaijñānika varṇāśrama* is inextricably related to *sādhana-bhakti*.<sup>12</sup>

The express purpose of Vedic *varṇāśrama-dharma* was to raise human society from the lowest stages of material life to the highest stage of devotional fulfillment. This is accomplished by managing mankind's physical, mental, social, and spiritual life in accordance with devotional culture. The cultivation of devotion, therefore, is the ultimate purpose of *varṇāśrama-dharma*. He writes, "The main purpose of *varṇāśrama-dharma* is to obey the laws of health, to cultivate and improve the faculty of the mind, to cultivate the social good, and to learn spiritual truth in order to cultivate devotion."<sup>13</sup>... Therefore the observance of *varṇāśrama-dharma* is a necessity for the cultivation of devotion."<sup>14</sup> In this way *sādhana-bhakti* can best be undertaken within the culture of scientific or Vedic *varṇāśrama-dharma*.

The concern is raised, however, that the practice of *varṇāśrama-dharma* can be overly elaborate and time-consuming and often not in full harmony with the practice of devotion. Consequently, it is asked: how much *varṇā-*

*śrama-dharma* should actually be undertaken by the *sādhaka*<sup>15</sup> and what should be the course of action when conflict arises between *varṇāśrama-dharma* and *sādhana-bhakti*<sup>16</sup> Bhaktivinoda answers by saying that if the body, mind, society, and spiritual life are not protected and nourished, there is little possibility that devotion can be cultivated. "If death is premature, or if mental disease arises, or if social revolution occurs, or if there is a lack of spiritual education, how can the seeds of devotion take hold in the heart?"<sup>17</sup> Moreover, when *varṇāśrama-dharma* is abandoned arbitrarily (without devotional purity), the bodily and mental demands of life lead to moral degradation. Bhaktivinoda, therefore, insists that the practice of *varṇāśrama-dharma* is necessary for the cultivation of devotion in spite of its time-consuming and elaborate nature.<sup>18</sup> In the end, he suggests that the cultivation of devotion will shorten the course of *varṇāśrama-dharma*<sup>19</sup> and he advises the devotional practitioner to progress slowly, step by step, and gradually leave those portions of *varṇāśrama-dharma* that are contrary to devotion.<sup>20</sup> He writes, "Finally, in the life of a Vaishnava, *varṇāśrama-dharma* becomes purified by *bhakti*; and being subservient to *sādhana-bhakti* in transcendental goodness, it remains in accord with both karma and *bhakti*."<sup>21</sup>

Just how the rules of *varṇāśrama-dharma* become sanctified through the process of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* is explained in the following way. *Vidhis* are of two kinds, primary rules (*mukhya-vidhi*) and secondary rules (*gauṇa-vidhi*).<sup>22</sup> Those rules which pertain directly to devotion, such as hearing divine *tīlā*, chanting the holy name, seeing the sacred image, and surrendering to guru are *mukhya-vidhi* because "the direct fruit of the *vidhi* is God's worship (*upāsana*)."<sup>23</sup> The sixty-four elements (*aṅgas*) of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* that Rūpa Gosvāmī mentions all fall within the category of *mukhya-vidhi*. Secondary rules, on the other hand, are rules that are only indirectly related to God's worship. For the most part these are the rules of *varṇāśrama-dharma*. Bhaktivinoda gives the following example: By taking a morning bath the mind becomes calm because the body is cool and free of disease. Although the direct result of bathing is mental calmness and physical cleanliness, and not devotion *per se*, it does happen that the worship of God is improved through bathing. Consequently, when bathing is done in relation to the worship of God, it becomes a secondary aspect or *gauṇa-vidhi* of *sādhana-bhakti*.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the other rules of *varṇāśrama-dharma*, when undertaken in relation to devotion, can benefit devotional life and thereby are converted into *gauṇa-vidhi*. This can only take place, however, when the rules of *mukhya-vidhi* have first been firmly established in the life

of the *sādhaka*. In this way the rules of *mukhya-vidhi* work in conjunction with *varṇāśrama-dharma*. Through *vaidhī-bhakti* the heart of the *sādhaka* is cleansed and prepared for the next step along the path of devotion, *rāgā-nugā-bhakti-sādhana*.

Bhaktivinoda gives an indication of this next step as follows:

When the conditioned soul has strong attachment (*anurāga*) for things other than Krishna, he appears to be without attachment for Krishna. In this situation, if he is desirous of his well-being, he performs *kṣṇa-bhājana* by the order of *śāstra* only. This is *vaidha-bhājana*.<sup>25</sup>...So long as deep attachment (*rāga*) for Krishna has not arisen, the *sādhaka* must be devoted to Krishna out of a sense of duty by adopting the primary and secondary rules of devotion.<sup>26</sup>...*Rāga* is rare, but when it arises the *vidhis* no longer hold the *sādhaka*. However, until that time it is the main duty of a person to be guided by *vidhis*....It is only the most fortunate and highly competent person who is able to walk the path of *rāga*.<sup>27</sup>

In the initial stages of devotion the effectiveness of *śāstra* is more or less based on a sense of duty, a hope of a future reward, or a fear of sin. Duty, hope, and fear, however, do not constitute pure motives of worship.<sup>28</sup> Eventually the path of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* matures and a state of internal desire called *rāga* arises as the practitioner wishes to practice devotion free of any sense of duty, hope, or fear. Bhaktivinoda further points out, "Fear and hope are contemptible. When the intelligence of the practitioner develops he gradually gives up fear and hope and begins to follow *śāstra* out of a sense of duty alone. That sense of duty cannot be abandoned until the state of *rāga* towards God develops."<sup>29</sup> In this way the path of devotion gradually transforms from a state of obligation to one of spontaneous passion, called *rāga*. Therefore, the manifestation of *rāga* is the ultimate goal of *vaidhī-bhakti*. When *rāga* springs forth in the heart of the *sādhaka*, devotional life takes on a new vibrancy as the door to *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* opens wide.

### *Rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*

When the *sādhaka* experiences *rāga*, he is no longer content to follow the rules of *bhakti* in a passive state. Instead, he intensely desires to experience *līlā* directly as a participant. In such a condition, the *sādhaka* is ready to adopt the path of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*.<sup>30</sup> Bhaktivinoda describes this condition: "When *lobha* [intense desire] for the path of *rāgānugā* has arisen, the *sādhaka* should approach the proper guru with great humility. Examin-

ing the disciple's inclinations, the guru instructs the disciple and introduces his *bhajana* along with the details of the disciple's *siddha-deha*.<sup>31</sup>

The term *siddha-deha* is significant. Literally, *siddha-deha* means "perfect body." In the context of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*, the *siddha-deha* is the "spiritual body" that the *sādhaka* uses to participate within *līlā*. This is where the influence of Gopālaguru Gosvāmī and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī and the post-Rūpa tradition of *sādhana-bhakti* become evident in Bhaktivinoda's approach to religious *sādhana*.

Again there is no need to elaborate on the details of Rūpa Gosvāmī's system of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. Instead, we will summarize by saying that unlike *vaidhī-bhakti*, *rāgānugā-bhakti* involves the transformation of identity. This change of identity is accomplished as the *sādhaka* patterns his internal feelings and activities after one of the exemplary characters among the residents of eternal Vrindavan. By approximating the internal feelings and activities of these eternal residents, who are considered *rāgātmikā* bhaktas, the *sādhaka* learns to develop a frame of mind and mood similar to those within Vrindavan *līlā*. In *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*, the *sādhaka* learns to actually participate within *līlā* in one of the five primary relationships: *śānta*, *dāśya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *mādhurya*. In this way the relationship between the three forms of bhakti—*vaidhī-bhakti*, *rāgānugā-bhakti*, and *rāgātmikā-bhakti*—can be simply stated: *vaidhī-bhakti* prepares the way for *rāgānugā-bhakti* and *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* is what one does to attain the stage of *rāgātmikā-bhakti*. Rūpa Gosvāmī, however, does not specifically mention the *siddha-deha* or "spiritual body" that the *sādhaka* uses to practice *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. That appears to be a later development about which Bhaktivinoda has much to say.

The following example, cited from the *Jaiva-dharma*, shows how the path of *rāga-bhakti* is initiated, how *siddha-deha* is adopted, and how transformation of identity actually occurs. Vijaya Kumāra and Vrajanātha, two fictional but typical sixteenth-century Caitanya Vaishnavas, are disciples of one Raghunātha Dāsa Babaji in Navadvīp. Vijaya is married with a family and Vrajanātha is about to get married. Raghunātha Dāsa is a *siddha-puruṣa*, or a master of esoteric devotional practice. After learning the tenets of *vaidhī-bhakti* and becoming established in that *sādhana*, Vijaya and Vrajanātha approach their guru with the intention of requesting initiation into the path of *rāgānugā-bhakti*. The scene opens as follows: "A wonderful feeling arose in the minds of Vijaya Kumāra and Vrajanātha, both unanimously decided to be initiated by Babaji Maharaja, who was a master in the spiritual field....

The next morning they finished their bath in the Ganges, put on twelve marks of *tilaka*, and went to Raghunātha Dāsa Babaji, where they prostrated themselves at his feet.<sup>32</sup> Vrajanātha asks, "What is *rāga*?" Babaji answers by explaining the many details of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. Finally, Vrajanātha asks the most important question, "What kind of *rāgānugā-bhakti* are we qualified for?"<sup>33</sup> In other words: How is the *sādhaka* to know in which relationship he belongs and which *rāgātmikā-bhakta* he is to follow? Babaji answers as follows:

My child, minutely study your nature (*svabhāva*), and according to your nature and feelings (*ruci*), cultivate the appropriate sentiment (*rasa*). Attend to one who is eternally perfected in respect to that *rasa*. In this regard you must examine your feelings exclusively. If you have feelings for the path of *rāga*, then act according to those feelings, but so long as you have no feelings for the path of *rāga*, you should have firm faith in the path of *vaidhī-bhakti*.<sup>34</sup>

Accordingly, Vijaya Kumāra describes how he has been listening to the activities of Śrī Krishna from the *Bhāgavata* for a long time and has become inclined to hear about the *līlā* of Rādhā and Krishna in the mood of Śrīmatī Lalitā Devī.<sup>35</sup> To this Babaji immediately replies, "You need say no more. You are a *mañjarī* following Lalitā Devī. What type of service do you like best?"<sup>36</sup> Vijaya responds, "I think I am ordered by Lalitā Devī to string garlands of flowers; I shall cut beautiful flowers and make garlands and hand them to her; she will smile on me out of infinite grace and put them round the neck of Rādhā and Krishna."<sup>37</sup> Babaji responds, "May your desire for service (*sevā*) be fulfilled, I bless you....My son, go on practicing *rāgānugā-bhakti* in this way, but externally let the practice of the various limbs of *vaidhī-bhakti* continue."<sup>38</sup>

Vrajanātha then says, "My master, whenever I study the loving activities of Śrī Krishna, I feel the urge to follow in the foot-steps of Subala."<sup>39</sup> Babaji asks, "What things are you inclined to do?" Vrajanātha responds, "I would like to fetch the calves as a companion of Subala. Sitting nearby, Krishna plays on His flute, and being favored by Subala, I let the calves drink water and bring them to Krishna—this is my heart's desire." Babaji says, "I bless you that you may serve Krishna in obedience to Subala. You are eligible to cultivate the sentiment of friendship (*sakhya-rasa*)."<sup>40</sup>

Here both Vijaya and Vrajanātha are preparing to follow what Rūpa Go-

svāmī has defined as, “that (method of bhakti) which follows the *rāgātmikā-bhakti* clearly manifest in the inhabitants of Vraja.”<sup>41</sup> This, of course, is *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. Vijaya will follow the mood of *rāgātmikā-bhakti* demonstrated by Lalitā Devī according to the *mādhurya-rasa*, and Vrajanātha will follow the mood of *rāgātmikā-bhakti* expressed by Subala as *sakhyā-rasa*. They will respectively study the *līlā* activities of these *rāgātmikā-bhaktas* as they gradually internalize the feelings of these paradigmatic individuals.

There is, however, just one more aspect to this story that reflects the further developments beyond Rūpa Gosvāmī’s original definition of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. Both Vijaya and Vrajanātha ask, “What more remains to be done in this respect?” To which Babaji replies, “Nothing at all, except that you must know the name, appearance, garment, and so on, of your spiritual body (*siddha-deha*). Come alone later and I will tell you.”<sup>42</sup> Bhaktivinoda concludes this incident as follows:

On that day Vrajanātha and Vijaya considered themselves to be blessed, and with great delight, set themselves to following the path of *rāga*. Externally everything remained the same as before; all their manners were like those of a man, but internally Vijaya Kumāra was imbued with the nature of a woman and Vrajanātha assumed the nature of a cow-herd boy.<sup>43</sup>

The final statement of Babaji, “You must know the name, appearance, garment, and so on, of your spiritual body (*siddha-deha*),” is indicative of that part of the later tradition of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* that has to do with precisely how transformation of identity takes place. This is a key element in Bhaktivinoda’s approach to *rāgānugā-bhakti*. Let us examine this part of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition and see how he interprets it.

After Rūpa Gosvāmī, the tradition of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* is dominated by many important personalities, among whom are Gopālaguru Gosvāmī,<sup>44</sup> Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī,<sup>45</sup> Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura,<sup>46</sup> Viśvanātha Cakravartī<sup>47</sup> and Siddha Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābā.<sup>48</sup> Gopālaguru Gosvāmī, Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī, and Siddha Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābā have each composed a *paddhati*, or manual outlining the details of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*.<sup>49</sup> Collectively these works are known as the *paddhati-traya*, and they comprise the *bhajana-paddhatis* for the Caitanya Vaishnavas.<sup>50</sup> We have mentioned that among these personalities, Gopālaguru Gosvāmī and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī figure prominently in Bhaktivinoda’s writings and have had the greatest influence on his approach to *sādhana-bhakti*.



It is of interest that none of these followers of Caitanya discusses the path of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* to any great extent; instead they focus their attention on *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* and in particular on the *mādhurya-rasa*. Under their influence three new developments were introduced. The first is the creation of a specialized form of spiritual practice called *mañjarī-sādhana*, in which the *sādhaka* in meditation assumes the identity of a young maidservant (*mañjarī*) in Krishna *līlā*. The second is a ritualization of the manner in which spiritual identity is assumed, called *siddha-praṇālī-dīkṣā* or sometimes *ekādaśa-bhāva*. The third is an extension and formalization of the process of remembrance (*līlā-smaraṇa*) called *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā-smaraṇa*. Each of these developments is represented in the *sādhana* of Bhaktivinoda.

Gopālaguru and Dhyānacandra are specifically mentioned in Bhaktivinoda's *Jaiva-dharma* when Vijaya Kumāra and Vrajanātha travel to Puri to meet them for instruction.<sup>51</sup> Vijaya and Vrajanātha are told to find Gopālaguru, "in the house of Kāśī Mīśra at Śrī Puruṣottama." There they hear that, "At the house of Kāśī Mīśra in Puri, Śrī Gopālaguru Gosvāmī, the disciple of Śrī Vakreśvara, now occupies the honored seat of Śrīman Mahāprabhu."<sup>52</sup> They are told to have *darśana* of his lotus feet and take his instruction respectfully. Bhaktivinoda tells us that, "Śrī Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī was a past master in all subjects, and in the matter of worship of Hari especially he was second to none. He was the first and foremost of all the disciples of Śrī Gopālaguru Gosvāmī. He gave instruction on all the principles of *bhajana* to Vijaya and Vrajanātha, considering them competent to learn the matter of worship."<sup>53</sup> There is, therefore, no question that Bhaktivinoda held both Gopālaguru and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmīs in high esteem.<sup>54</sup>

When Babaji says to Vijaya Kumāra and Vrajanātha, "You must know the name, appearance, garment, and so on, of your spiritual body," he is referring to the specific manner in which the transformation of identity takes place as described in the *paddhati-traya*. In these works a third level of initiation called *siddha-praṇālī-dīkṣā*<sup>55</sup> is described where eleven aspects (*ekādaśa-bhāva*) of a spiritual identity are given to the *sādhaka* by the guru. These eleven aspects characterize the internal spiritual persona, usually of a *mañjarī*, that allows the *sādhaka* to participate within Krishna *līlā*. The word *mañjarī* here refers to a young maid who serves the needs of Rādhā and Krishna in *mādhurya-rasa*.<sup>56</sup> Bhaktivinoda refers to this when he states that privately the *sāragrāhī* conceives of himself as a woman while externally he acts bodily [as a man].<sup>57</sup> Here the *sāragrāhī* perceives himself as a *mañjarī* according to the tradition of *siddha-praṇālī-dīkṣā*.



### *Siddha-praṇālī*

In the final chapter of the *Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi* (1900), Bhaktivinoda describes the details of *siddha-praṇālī-dīkṣā* as follows: "In order to fulfill one's ambitions for attaining *ujjvala-rasa* [*mādhurya-rasa*] there are eleven items that form one's spiritual identity: relationship (*sambandha*), age (*vayasa*), name (*nāma*), form (*rūpa*), group (*yūtha*), dress (*veśa*), assignment (*ājñā*), residence (*vāsa*), service (*sevā*), highest ambition (*parākāṣṭhā*), and feeling one's self protected and maintained (*pālyadāsi*)."<sup>58</sup> These eleven items are conferred on the disciple by the guru during initiation to define an internal spiritual identity that the *sādhaka* gradually learns to use to participate within Krishna *līlā*.

Just how such a spiritual identity is implemented is described as follows: "The *sādhana* relating to these eleven items is executed in five progressive stages: *śravaṇa-daśā* (the stage of hearing), *varaṇa-daśā* (the stage of accepting), *smaraṇa-daśā* (the stage of remembering), *āpana-daśā* (the stage of maturing), and *sampatti-daśā* (the stage of attainment)."<sup>59</sup>

Regarding the first stage, *śravaṇa-daśā*, Bhaktivinoda writes: "One should approach a guru who is considered more advanced than one's self and hear the principles of *bhāva* from him. This is the stage of hearing. There are two aspects of *bhāva-tattva* that you must consider: the eleven components of your own spiritual identity, and *kṛṣṇa-līlā*."<sup>60</sup>

After this comes *varaṇa-daśā*, or the stage of accepting the eleven aspects of a spiritual persona. This is the most interesting stage. Bhaktivinoda writes: "When *lobha* arises upon hearing Rādhā-Krishna's *līlā*, the disciple may ask at the feet of his Guru, 'O reverend sir, how is it possible to attain such *līlās*?' If pleased with the disciple, the guru will then mercifully explain the principles of *līlā* in relation to the *sādhaka*'s internal identity saying, 'You may enter *līlā* in this way. After hearing with innocence about this sacred mood, you shall accept this within your own heart.' This is the stage of acceptance called *varaṇa-daśā*."<sup>61</sup>

*Varaṇa-daśā* is the stage when the *ekādaśa-bhāva* or the eleven aspects of internal identity are conferred: The first item is called *sambandha* or relationship. According to Bhaktivinoda *sambandha* means serving Krishna through one of the five primary ecstatic relationships known as *śānta*, *dāsyā*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *mādhurya*. In the *Caitanya-sampradāya*, the main emphasis has traditionally been on *mādhurya-rasa*; consequently, the *paddhatīs* discuss *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* only in relation to *mañjarī-sādhana*. In fact,

Vrajanātha's adoption of *sakhyā-rasa* is a rare instance and one that shows that according to Bhaktivinoda the aspects of an internal spiritual identity may be applied to all of the major *rasas*.

According to Rūpa Gosvāmī, a *sādhaka* can model one's mind, mood, and activities on any of the *rāgātmikā-bhaktas* of Krishna līlā. This, in theory, could include all of the primary relationships. As we have mentioned, however, the later tradition does not generally accommodate any of the relationships other than *mādhurya-rasa*, and even within that relationship the focus is on a very specific form of *mādhurya-rasa* called *mañjarī-sādhana*. But, in fact, according to Bhaktivinoda, the *ekādaśa-bhāva* could be applied to any of the relationships.

Bhaktivinoda builds on Rūpa Gosvāmī's original idea of *sambandha* as one of the five primary relationships and thereby broadens the meaning of *sambandha* to include all other primary relationships. If the primary relationship is *vātsalya*, for example, then the nature of that relationship will determine the details of the other ten items of internal identity. This is an important innovation or perhaps restoration by Bhaktivinoda and it shows how the tradition of *rāgānugā-sādhana* can be expanded beyond just the *mādhurya-rasa*. Unfortunately, Bhaktivinoda does not discuss the specific details of attaining an internal persona within any of the relationships other than *mādhurya-rasa*. In the case of Vrajanātha, who chooses *sakhyā-rasa*, Babaji asks him to return later to hear the eleven items of his spiritual persona as a cowherd. But that is the last we hear of the matter. It would have been interesting to hear the details of Vrajanātha's spiritual persona within the *sakhyā-rasa*. Because Bhaktivinoda does not elaborate on the matter, but only discusses the detail of *mañjarī-sādhana*, the balance of our discussion is only in reference to the *mādhurya-rasa*.

Through these eleven items the *sādhaka* is able to focus on an internal reality that is eventually meant to surpass the *sādhaka*'s external physical reality.

To this description Bhaktivinoda adds one important qualification: the spiritual persona must match the natural feelings and psychology of the *sādhaka*. He writes, "At the time of acceptance, after discerning one's own *ruci* or taste for devotion you should humbly declare at the guru's feet: 'Lord, my full delight is in whatever identification you mercifully give. By nature my hankering is for this feeling, thus I am satisfied in accepting your command.'"<sup>62</sup> Bhaktivinoda explains that the *siddha-deha* is the soul's most precious possession so it must correspond in every way to the *sādhaka*'s per-

sonal choice. If not, the required motivation to attain such a spiritual body will be lacking. Therefore, he advises, "If there is no liking [for the assignment of the spiritual body] then one should candidly declare one's own liking at the feet of the guru. Upon reflection, the guru will give a different persona. If there is liking for it, then one's proper persona will become manifest."<sup>63</sup> Bhaktivinoda continues, "At that time, the disciple must take full shelter of his guru and say, 'I accept this [*ekādaśa-bhāva*] which you have given me as my own, not only in this life, but also after death."<sup>64</sup>

Compared to how the existing tradition in Vrindavan regards the conferral of the *siddha-deha*, the manner in which Bhaktivinoda interprets the adoption of the spiritual persona seems comparatively rational and psychological.<sup>65</sup> This is an important innovation that reflects the secular and rational outlook of modernity. In contrast, David Haberman mentions two theories that illustrate how the *siddha-deha* is traditionally received. He calls one the "inherent theory" and the other the "assigned theory."<sup>66</sup> According to the "inherent theory" every *jīva* already has an existing eternal *siddha-deha*. During initiation, the guru "sees" the initiate's eternal identity in *līlā* by meditation and reveals this true identity to the *sādhaka*, who then begins the practice of *rāgānugā-bhakti* and eventually discovers for himself the reality of his eternal identity.

In the "assigned theory" the guru assigns the appropriate *siddha-deha* to the initiate. According to this interpretation, the *siddha-dehas* are like "shiny new cars," as Haberman quotes one modern commentator, that are assigned to the appropriate candidate according to the design of God through the mystic perception of the guru. In both theories, numerous inspiring stories abound to prove and illustrate how the *sādhaka* receives his actual inner form. While visiting Vrindavan, I, like David Haberman, also heard many of these amazing and mystical anecdotes.

According to Bhaktivinoda, the act of receiving a *siddha-deha* includes an attempt to match the psychological and emotional temperament of the *sādhaka* with the mood of the particular *rasika* relationship. It is less the result of a mystical intervention by the guru and more a mutual decision between guru and disciple. At the time of *siddha-praṇālī-dīkṣā*, the candidate approaches the guru and together decide on the appropriate spiritual persona for the disciple according to the internal *ruci* or feelings of the *sādhaka*.

In this way, Bhaktivinoda's approach is more along the lines of the "assigned theory" except that his approach seems to include more psychological and empirical input than what traditionally may be the case. In

other words, as one becomes more and more purified through devotional practice, one's natural (*sahaja*) spiritual condition begins to develop. Such an emotional and psychological condition may then be taken as a reflection or indication of one's inherent spiritual condition. The devotional feelings that one may experience in the phenomenal body can be used to help decide the appropriate spiritual identity.

And, most important, if after some time the *sādhaka* feels that his identity is not suited to his internal disposition he may again approach the guru to ask for an adjustment or a new identity altogether.<sup>67</sup> In this way the disciple receives an appropriate *siddha-deha* through a cooperative effort with his guru, rather than by a flash of spiritual revelation by the guru alone.

For Bhaktivinoda, the *ekādaśa-bhāva* is a meditative system, perhaps we could even suggest a technical *device*, used to lead the disciple to a realization of his or her true inner identity. Therefore, what the guru bestows on the disciple is not the *siddha-deha* directly, but a working model of a *siddha-deha*. This seems to be a significant empirical innovation, and certainly it is one that fits well with Bhaktivinoda's task of interpreting the process of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* in the context of modernity.

So far we have completed our review of the first two stages of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* and the *siddha-praṇālī* process, namely *śravaṇa-daśā* and *varaṇa-daśā*. The final stages, *smaraṇa-daśā*, *āpana-daśā*, and *sampatti-daśā* involve the practice, maturing, and fulfillment of *līlā-smaraṇa* (remembering the pastimes) in one's *mañjarī-svarūpa* (nature as a maid-servant). *Smaraṇa-daśā* can be summarily described as follows:

One should regularly practice *ekādaśa-bhāva-smaraṇa* with special attention to the *līlā* corresponding to one's mood. In considering these pastimes one becomes enlivened. The *līlā* in which the *sādhaka* finds interest needs to be contemplated continuously; otherwise if *smaraṇa* that is not suited to him is done, *siddhi* (perfection) may not take place even after many lifetimes of devotional practice."<sup>68</sup>...As one's *sādhana* is practiced, quickly the pure stage of *āpana-daśā* arises. From continuous contemplation of one's pure persona the mind quickly becomes free from material bondage."<sup>69</sup>

*Āpana-daśā* and *sampatti-daśā*, the stages of maturing and fulfillment, can be summarized as follows: "When there is unwavering *samādhi* (contemplation) on one's *svārūpa* and the stage of *āpana-daśā* arises, one's sense of self shifts from the material body to the *siddha-deha*. At that time one continuously

becomes a resident of Vraj in spiritual form.”<sup>70</sup> In this way, these final stages of *ekādaśa-bhāva* describe a gradual strengthening of the meditative process as the *sādhaka* becomes increasingly adept in the use of *siddha-deha* during meditation. Bhaktivinoda even provides a letter of initiation (*dikṣā-patra*) that outlines the detail of his *siddha-deha*. I originally obtained a reproduction of a handwritten copy of his *dikṣā-patra* written in Bengali along with its transcription and translation from Bhaktivinoda’s maternal family’s home.

The *dikṣā-patra*, as the term implies, is an initiation letter that gives both the *siddha-praṇālī* and the *ekādaśa-bhāva* for Bhaktivinoda’s entire *dikṣā* line running back to Śrī Jāhnavā Mā, the wife of Nityānanda Prabhu.<sup>71</sup> I’ve included both Bengali and English translation of Bhaktivinoda’s *dikṣā-patra* in my dissertation.

To substantiate the information found in the *dikṣā-patra*, we find that in the *Siddhi-lālasā* section of the *Gītā-mālā*, one of Bhaktivinoda’s song books, he includes a selection of verses where he describes his *mañjarī-svarūpa* as follows:<sup>72</sup>

My bodily complexion is like lightning and the color of my dress is like a cluster of stars. My name is Kamalā Mañjarī; I am eternally 12 1/2 years old, and my residence is called Svānanda Sukhada Kuñja. My *sevā* is to bring camphor and I am in Lalitā’s group. Our party leader is Śrī Rādhā, and the Lord of my Goddess is Śrī Nandanandana [Krishna]. They are the treasure of my life. My greatest hope is to attain *yugala-sevā* like that of Śrī Rūpa and the other *mañjarīs*. Certainly I shall reach that goal because I have strong faith. When will this *dāsī* attain perfection and make her residence at Rādhā-kuṇḍa? Always serving Rādhā and Krishna, she will give up the memories of the past. While serving the lotus feet of the daughter of Vṛṣabhānu [Śrī Rādhā], I shall be protected and maintained by Her. I shall always try to make Śrī Rādhikā happy. I know that Kṛṣṇa’s happiness lies in seeing Rādhā happy. I shall never desire to give up the lotus feet of Rādhā to mix personally with Krishna. The *sakhīs* in my group are my best friends, as well as my teachers in the art of loving Rādhā and Krishna. Following them, I shall serve Rādhikā’s lotus feet, which are like wish-fulfilling trees.”<sup>73</sup>

If we compare this description with the information found in the *dikṣā-patra*, we find that they match perfectly. All this evidence shows that Bhaktivinoda personally participated in and promoted the path of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*, which included the process of *siddha-praṇālī* as delineated by Gopālaguru and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmīs.

In general, the modern-day Hare Krishna movement has inherited the mood of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, i.e., that in this age one would do best to get one's *siddha-deha*, or perfected spiritual body, by the grace of the guru as one is ready for it, rather than have it assigned at initiation. This comes about, they say, by the expert chanting of *siddha mantras*, Kāma Gāyatrī and the Gopāla mantra, and by becoming adept at the chanting of the Holy Name. There is some substantiation of this process in Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Bṛhat-bhāgavatāmṛta* and in Krishnadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī's commentary to the first verse of *Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta*, and in the earlier teachings of Rūpa Gosvāmī as well. But Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura definitely saw value in the system that arose just after the time of Rūpa, i.e., the system elaborated upon by Gopāla Guru and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī—that of assigning one's *siddha-deha* by an initiation process called *siddha-praṇālī*, which we have shown to be the method adhered to by Bhaktivinoda. It seems that both methods have a place in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition.

### Conclusion

The Caitanya Vaishnava tradition that has recently emerged in the West (in the form of ISKCON and other related organizations) is largely a *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* tradition in which the approach of *rāgānugā-bhakti* has been deemphasized. For this reason, among others, the new tradition appears to be somewhat alienated from the esoteric depth and spiritual inspiration of its parent movement, even though it is, no doubt, a current manifestation of the Rūpānuga *sampradāya*, which follows the mood of Rūpa Mañjarī (Rūpa Gosvāmī) and thus has *rāgānugā-bhakti* at its heart. I have no doubt that for many modern adherents, especially in the West, the path of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* is most appropriate and even practical, given their environment and cultural situation. It is easy to imagine the consequences of premature adherence to the path of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. The idea of males assuming internal female identities in order to contemplate what appear to be erotic episodes is a matter begging to create problems and public controversy. The dangers of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* in the hands of immature or unscrupulous individuals and groups is obvious.

For this reason, Bhaktivinoda clearly taught the importance of the exoteric mode in his discussions on *varṇāśrama-dharma* and *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana*. In all cases, he stressed the need for discipline and social structure. However, while the emphasis on *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* may avoid many of the problems associated with *rāgānugā-bhakti*, it can also deny practitioners

access to much of the tradition's esoteric depth.

And so while Bhaktivinoda clearly taught the importance of the exoteric mode, ultimately it was the esoteric tradition of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* that commanded the attention of his heart and soul. After all, as he suggests throughout his writings, *rāgānugā-bhakti* is one of the principal means by which the *rasika* religious experience may be accessed, and it is a genuine part of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition. Thus, for those devotees who may one day feel the fire of *rāga* pulling at the heartstrings of their soul, they may research the work of Bhaktivinoda, who has ever so carefully opened the door, once again, to the path of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. Regarding ISKCON: as it grows and learns more about its own heritage, we hope it will either look deeply into the teachings of its Founder-Ācārya and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, wherein one can find cautious allusions to the importance of *rāgānugā-bhakti*, or else seize upon the esoteric mysteries afforded by Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- ST—*Sajjana-toṣaṇī*  
 KS—*Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*  
*Jivānī-Svalikhita-jivānī*  
 CS—*Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta*, Bengali edition  
 CS Eng—*Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta*, English edition  
 JD—*Jaiva-dharma*, Bengali edition  
 JD Eng—*Jaiva-dharma*, English edition  
 TS—*Tattva-sūtra*, Bengali edition  
 TS Eng—*Tattva-sūtra*, English edition  
 CC—*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*  
*Bhāg-Bhāgavata-purāṇa*  
 BRS—*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*  
 HC—*Harī-nāma-cintāmaṇi*  
 TV—*Tattva-viveka*  
 DK—*Datta-kaustubha*  
 BG—*Bhagavad-gītā*

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Caitanya Vaishnava Movement is also known as the Gauḍīya Vaishnava Movement. I have elected to use the term Caitanya instead of Gauḍīya in order to avoid the geographic reference that is implied by the term Gauḍīya.

<sup>2</sup>BRS, 1/2/5: *vaidhī rāgānugā ceti sā dvidhā sādhanābhīdā*// The simple distinction between the two is that *vaidhī-bhakti* is followed according to the commands or rules

(*vidhis*) of *śāstra* and guru whereas *rāgānugā-bhakti* is followed out of a spontaneous longing (*lobha*) for devotion.

<sup>3</sup>The works of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami best describe Rūpa Gosvāmī's system of *vaidhī-sādhana-bhakti*. In summary: *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* is usually adopted as the first step on the path of devotion. The word *vaidhī* is derived from "*vidhi*," meaning "rules." Therefore, *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* is the means of fixing the mind on Krishna by following the dictates of various *vidhis* or scriptural rules. Specifically, *vidhi* refers to the sixty-four limbs (*aṅgas*) of bhakti that Rūpa Gosvāmī enumerates. While Bhaktivinode lists and discusses all sixty-four of these items, he stresses the first twenty as follows:

- Taking shelter at the feet of a guru
- Receiving initiation and instruction from the guru
- Serving the guru with great faith
- Following the path of the saints
- Inquiring about eternal dharma
- Giving up all pleasures for the sake of Krishna
- Living near the Gaṅgā or holy places like Dwaraka
- Living simply
- Observing fasting on *ekādaśī*
- Respecting the Tulasī and Banyan trees
- To give up the association of those not respecting Krishna
- To abandon attempts to secure disciples
- To abandon the desire for great pomp
- Not to read too many books
- Not to be neglectful in ordinary dealings
- Not to be overwhelmed in sorrows or gain
- Not to disrespect other gods
- Not to cause suffering to other beings
- Being careful not to create offense in Deity service or to the Holy Name
- Not to tolerate criticism of Krishna or His devotees.

These twenty items along with the other forty-four items form sixty-four *aṅgas* or limbs of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana*. Of these sixty-four items, the first three, accepting a guru, receiving initiation and instruction, and serving the guru, are mentioned by Bhaktivinode as the most important.

<sup>4</sup>In academic circles, the work of David Haberman best describes the system of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. A brief description of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* is as follows: Literally, the word *rāga* means passion. *Rāga* is something that is generally considered undesirable for those on the spiritual path because it leads to attachment to material objects. Here, however, *rāga* is used in the sense of passion and deep attachment for God—an emotion greatly sought after in *sādhana-bhakti*. Another



word that is used in a similar way is *lobha*, meaning “greed.” *Lobha*, or greed for Krishna, is again a desirable characteristic.

Rūpa Gosvāmī defines *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* as, “that method of bhakti which follows the mood of the *rāgātmikā-bhakti* [that] clearly manifests itself in the residents of Vraja.” Thus, the term *rāgānugā* appropriately means “following the passion.” Here the residents of Vraja, mother Yaśodā, Nanda Maharaja, the various *gopālas* and *gopikās*, and so on, become role models, who exhibit a perfect love for Krishna that Rūpa Gosvāmī calls *rāgātmikā-bhakti*. The *rāgātmikā-bhakti* of the Vrajaloka, the residents of Vrindavan, is a spontaneous love that totally binds the worshipper and the worshipped. Thus the love of the Vrajaloka is a fit model for those engaged in *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*. In this way the *sādhaka* studies the emotional status of the Vrajaloka and, by hearing the stories involving these individuals, learns to follow the mood of their *rāgātmikā-bhakti*.

<sup>5</sup>The term *bhadralok* literally means “respectable people” and is commonly used in Bengali literature to refer to any educated and respectable gentleman mainly of the three Bengali upper castes (Brahmins, *kāyasthas* and *vaidyas*). Bhaktivinoda uses the term in this way in his *Svalikhita-jīvanī*. In a more technical sense Meredith Borthwick points out that the word refers to both the *abhijāt bhadralok* and the *grhastha bhadralok*. The *abhijāt bhadralok* became permanent residents of Calcutta in the second half of the eighteenth century. Some rapidly acquired fortunes by working as junior partners with the British. This group included such individuals as Rammohun Roy, Radhakanta Deb, and Dwarkanath Tagore. The *grhastha bhadralok* were the next layer of middle-income Bengalis that included small landholders, government employees, members of the professions, teachers, and journalists. Kedarnath Dutta Bhaktivinoda and most of his colleagues, such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Keshub Chandra Sen, and Sisir Kumar Ghosh were members of this latter class of *grhastha bhadralok*. For more information see Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>6</sup>The *varṇas* are Brahmin (priestly class), Kshatriya (martial class), Vaishya (mercantile community) and Shudra (laborers). The *āśramas* are those of the *brahmacārī* (student), *grhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (retired) and *sannyāsī* (renounced).

<sup>7</sup>CS, pt. 1, 140: *varṇāśrama-rūpa dharma sthita haiyā jīvana-yātrā nirvāha karite karite cit-take kṣṣṇa-pāda-padme nīta karibāra janya vaidha-bhakta niranantara yatna karibena, ihākei bhakti-yoga bale/*

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 83: *yathārtha balite gele, ṛṣidigera haste samāja-niṣṭha-vidhira carama unmati haiyāchela, ihā samasta sahādaya o vaijñānika vyakti-gaṇai svikāra karibena/ tāñhārā vaijñānika vicāra-krame samāja-niṣṭha-vidhike dui bhāge vibhakta kariyāchilena: yathā varṇa-vidhi o āśrama-vidhi/*

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.: *samāj-niṣṭha mānavera dui-prakāra avasthā arthāt: svabhāva o avasthāna/ jana-niṣṭha dharma haite svabhāva o samāja-niṣṭha dharma haite avasthāna*

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 131: *ye paryanta dharma arthake mātra uddēśa kare, se paryanta ai dharma ārthi-*

ka baliyā abhihita haya/... ārthika dharmera anyatara nāma naitika vā smārta-dharma/

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 107: iuropiya jātidigera vartmāna samāja ālocanā karile dekhā yāibe ye, ai samāje yatafuku saundarya āche, tāhāo svabhāvajanita varṇa-dharmake āśraya kariyā āche/ iurope ye vyakti varṇik-svabhāva, se vāṇijyai bhālavāse o vāṇijya-dvārā unnati-sādhana kariteche/ ye vyakti kṣatra-svabhāva se "miliṭārī lāina" vā sainika-kriyā avalambana kare/ yāhārā śūdra-svabhāva, tāhārā sāmānya sevākārya bhālavāse/

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 131: yakhana ai dharma paramārtha paryanta uddeśa kare, takhana ai dharmera nāma pāramārthika dharma/... pāramārthika vaidha-dharmera nāma-sādhana-bhakti/

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 174: pūrei kathita haiyāche ye, śuddha-bhakti-sādhana uddeśe uttama-rūpe śarīra pālana, mānasavṛttir sundara anuśilana o unnati-sādhana, sāmājika maṅgalacarcā o ādhyātmika śikṣā varṇāśrama-dharmera mukhya tātparya/

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.: ataeva sei dharmera ānukūlye bhaktir anuśilana karibe/ bhakty-anuśilana janyai varṇāśrama-dharmera pālana karā prajoyana haiyāche/

<sup>15</sup>A sādha is a person who performs sādhana, religious practice.

<sup>16</sup>CS, pt. 1, 174-175: ekhana vivecyā ei ye, varṇāśrama-dharme yerūpa dīrgha-sūtrī kārya, tāhā karite gele bhaktyanūśilana avakāśa pāoyā yāya ki nā?

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.: ati śighra mṛtyu haile, vā citta vibhramādi vyādhi upasthita haile, aprākṛta tattva śikṣā nā pāile bhaktira anikura ye śraddhā, tāhā kirūpe hṛdaye jāgarita haile avakāśa lābha karibe?

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.: ataeva varṇāśrama kiyat-parimāṇe dīrgha-sūtrī haileo bhakti-sādhanera anukūla-rūpe svikāra karā kartavya/

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.: vaidhī-bhaktira anuśilana-krame tāhāra dīrgha-sūtritā kramaśaḥ kharva haiyā paḍibe/ tāhāra aṅga-sakala kramaśaḥ bhaktyaṅge pariṇati lābha karibe/

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.: ukta dharmera ye aṅga bhaktira pratikūla haya, se aṅgake kramaśaḥ parityāga karite thākibe/

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.: avāśe vaiṣṇava-jīvane varṇāśrama-dharmaḥ bhakti-pūta haiyā parama sāttvika-bhāve sādhana-bhaktira dāsa-svarūpe karma o bhaktira paraspara avirodhe vartamāna thākibe/

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 20: īśvarera tuṣṭi-sādhanai yakhana jīvanera ekamātra tātparya, takhana ye vidhi ukta tātparyake avyavahita-rūpe lakṣya kare, se vidhir nāma mukhya-viddhi/ ye vidhi kichu vyavadhānera sahita sei tātparyake lakṣya kare, se vidhī-gaṇa/

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 21: mukhya-vidhira sāksāt phalai bhagavad upāsanā/ vidhi o upāsanāra madhye avāntara phala nāi/ hari-kīrtana o hari-kathā śravaṇake mukhya-vidhi balā yāya/

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 20: ekaḥ udāharaṇa dīle e viśaya spaṣṭa haibe/ prātaḥ-snāna ekaḥ vidhi/ prātaḥ-snāna kariyā śarīra snigdha o roga-sūnya haile mana sthira haya/ mana sthira haile īśvaropāsanā karā yāya/ esthale jīvanera tātparya ye īśvaropāsanā/

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 63: kṣṇetara viśaye baddha-jīvera yakhana baḍa anurāga, takhana tāhāra kṣṇera prati rāga nā thākā-prāya baliyā bodha haya/ takhana maṅgala-prārthī jīva

kevala śāstrera ājñāya kṛṣṇa-bhajana karena/ei bhajanai vaidha bhajana/

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 19: ye paryanta viśuddha rāgera udaya nā haya, se paryanta sādhaaka avāśyai kartavya-buddhi-sahakāre gauṇa o mukhya-rūpa vidhi avalambana-pūrvaka kṛṣṇānuśilana karite thākibena/

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.: rāga virāla/ rāgera udaya haile vidhira āra bala thāke nā/ yekāla paryanta rāgera udaya nā haya, se paryanta vidhike āśraya karāi mānava-gaṇera pradhāna kartavya/... yāñhārā atyanta bhāgyavān o uccādhikārī, tāñhārāi kevala ai mārge calite samartha/

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 7: bhaya, āśā o kartavya-buddhi-dvārā ye sakala upāsaka īśvara-bhajane pravṛtta hana, tāñhādera bhajana tata viśuddha naya/

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 7: bhaya o āśā nitānta heya/ sādhaaka yakhana buddhi bhāla haya, takhana tini bhaya o āśā parityāga karena evaṃ kartavya-buddhi takhana tāñhāra ekamātra āśraya haya/ paramēśvarera prati rāgera ye paryanta udaya nā haya, se paryanta kartavya-buddhike sādhaaka parityāga kare nā/

<sup>30</sup>For an overview of rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana see *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* vol. 1, no.3. This issue is dedicated to the topic of rāgānugā-bhakti.

<sup>31</sup>CS, pt. 1., 315: sādhaaka yakhana rāgānuga-mārge lobha haya, takhana sad-gurura nikaṭa prārthanā karile tini sādhaaka ruci parikṣā kariyā tāñhāra bhajana-nirṇayera saṅge saṅge siddha-dehera paricaya kariyā dibena/

<sup>32</sup>JD, 369: vijaya kumāra o vrajanāthera citte eka-prakāra āścarya bhāva udaya haila-ubhayai eka mane sthira karilena ye, siddha-bābājī mahāśayera nikaṭa dikṣā grahaṇa karā avāśyaka/... paradina prāte gaṅgā-snāna samāpti karataḥ pūrvopadiṣṭa dvādaśa tilaka dhārana-pūrvaka śrīla raghunāthadāsa bābājī mahāśayera caraṇe giyā sāsṭāṅga-daṇḍavat praṇāma karilena/

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 381: āmādera ki prakāra rāgānugā-bhaktira adhikāra āche?

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.: bābā, nijera svabhāva vicāra kariyā dekha/ ye svabhāva haite ye rucira udaya haya, tadanusāre rasake svikāra kara, sei rasāvalambana-pūrvaka tāhāra nitya-siddhādhikārīra anugamana kara/ ihāte kevala nijera rucira parikṣā karā avāśyaka/ yadi rāga-mārge ruci haiyā thāke, tabe sei ruci anusāre kārya kara; ye paryanta rāga-mārge ruci haya nāi, kevala vidhi-mārge niṣṭhā kara/

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 381-2.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 382: tomāra āra balite haibe nā, tumi śrī-lalitādevīra anugatā mañjarī-viśeṣa/ tomāra kon sevā bhāla lāge? (Lalitā Devi is one of the chief gopīs.)

<sup>37</sup>ibid., āmāra mane haya ye, śrī-lalitā devī āmake puṣpa-mālā gumphana karite ājñā dena—āmi sundara puṣpa cayana kariyā mālā gumphana kariyā tāñhāra śrīhaste dība; tini āmāra prati kṛpā-hāsyā kariyā rādhā-kṛṣṇera galadeśe arpaṇa karibena/

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.: tomāra sei sevā-sādhana siddha hauka—āmi āśīrvāda kari... bābā, tumi niran-tara ei bhāve rāgānugā-bhaktira sādhana kara, bāhye niran-tara vaidhī-bhaktira sād-hana-aṅga-sakala śobhā pāite thākuka/

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.: *prabho, āmi yakhana yakhana kṛṣṇa-līlā anuśilana kari, takhana takhana subalera anugata haiyā thākite vāsana janmāya/* (Subala is one of Krishna's cowherd friends.)

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.: *āmi tomāke āśīrvāda kari, tumi subalera anugata haiyā kṛṣṇa-sevā karite thāka; tumi sakhya-raṣera adhikārī/*

<sup>41</sup>BRS, 1/2/168: *virājanāntīm abhivyaktām vraja-vāsi-janādiṣu/ rāgātmikām anuśṛtā vā sā rāgānugocya/*

<sup>42</sup>JD, 383: *vāki āra kichu' nāi, kevala tomāra siddha-śārīrera nāma, rūpa, paricchada, ityādi tomāra jānā āvaśyaka/*

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.: *vrajanātha o vijaya seidina āpana āpanāke kṛta-kṛtārtha jāniyā paramānande rāgānuga-mārgera sevāya niyukta hailena; bāhye pūrvavat samastai rahila-puruṣera nyāya samasta vyavahārai rahila, kintu vijaya-kumāra antare strī-svabhāva haiyā paḍilena; vrajanātha gopa-bālakera svabhāva lābha karilena/*

<sup>44</sup>Gopālaguru Gosvāmī (ca. 1550) was a disciple of Vakreśvara Paṇḍita, a contemporary of Caitanya.

<sup>45</sup>Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī (ca. 1600) was a disciple of Gopālaguru Gosvāmī. Both were from Orissa.

<sup>46</sup>Narottama Dāsa (ca. 1600) was a disciple of Lokanātha Gosvāmī of Vrindavan.

<sup>47</sup>Viśvanātha Cakravartī (ca. 1700) lived in Vrindavan sometime between 1654 and 1754. He was one of the most prominent commentators of Rūpa Gosvāmī.

<sup>48</sup>Siddha Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābā (ca. 1800) was from Govardhan, near Vrindavan. Bhaktivinoda does not mention him; considering that Kṛṣṇadāsa was so close to Bhaktivinoda's time it is safe to assume that Bhaktivinoda was unaware of his work or perhaps did not consider him an authority. In his *Guṭikā* Kṛṣṇadāsa lists himself as the ninth from Narottama. Therefore we place him circa. 1800.

<sup>49</sup>The compositions of both Gopālaguru and Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī bear the same title, *Śrī Gaura-govindārcana-smaraṇa-paddhati*. The *Śrī Gaura-govindārcana-paddhati* is by Siddha Kṛṣṇadāsa Bābā. I have copies of both these works.

<sup>50</sup>Dhyānacandra's *paddhati* is identical to Gopālaguru's, except that he has added items about *gaura-līlā-smaraṇa*, including *siddha-deha-dhyāna* for *Gaura-līlā*. Siddha Kṛṣṇadāsa's *paddhati* presents more details about Krishna's life in *mādhurya-rasa*.

<sup>51</sup>The narrative time setting of the *Jaiva-dharma* is about AD. 1600.

<sup>52</sup>JD, 435: *śrī-puruṣottame kāsīmīśrera bhavane śrīman-mahāprabhura gadite ājakāla śrī-vakreśvarera śiṣya śrī-gopālaguru gosvāmī virājamāna/* Apart from this statement Bhaktivinoda does not appear to discuss any other details concerning the *paramparā* or line of succession coming from Caitanya.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 484: *śrī-dhyānacandra gosvāmī sarva-sāstre paṇḍita chilena/ viśeṣataḥ hari-bhaja-tantrē tāñhāra tulya pāradarśi āra keha chila nā/ śrī-gopāla guru-gosvāmīra śiṣya-gaṇera madhye tīni agra-gaṇya/ vijaya o vrajanāthake bhajana-viśaye parama yogya jñāna*

*kariyā bhajana-paddhatira samasta tattva śikṣā diyāchilena/*

<sup>54</sup>The presence of Gopāla Guru and Dhyānacandra in Bhaktivinoda's writing is significant because it shows the intimate connection between Bhaktivinoda's *sādhana* and the process of *siddha-praṇālī*. The names of Gopāla Guru and Dhyānacandra are intimately associated with the process of *siddha-praṇālī*.

<sup>55</sup>The *Jaiva-dharma* describes initiation as a three step process. The first step is the giving of the holy name. This is sometimes called *hari-nāma* initiation wherein the initiate formally receives the famous *mahā-mantra*:

*hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare  
hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare/*

The *sādhaka* was requested to chant this mantra daily on a string of *tulasī* beads called *japa-mālā*. This is the *sādhaka*'s first step along the path of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana*. After some time when the *dikṣā-guru* feels that the disciple has matured, the next stage of initiation, called *mantra-dikṣā*, is offered. Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* describes how this initiation should be accompanied with great pomp and ceremony including a fire sacrifice (*agni-hotra*), but in the *Jaiva-dharma*, it is reduced to just the giving of mantra. Vijaya Kumāra and Vrajanātha receive initiation in just a simple statement, "Babaji Mahashay took them separately into his cottage and gave them the holy mantra consisting of eighteen syllables." *Mantra-dikṣā* is also a part of *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana*. The third and final rite is called *siddha-praṇālī-dikṣā*, wherein the initiate receives eleven characteristics (*ekādaśa-bhāva*) of a spiritual persona known as the *siddha-deha* or the perfected body. This is the initiation into *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* according to the method of the *paddhati-traya*.

<sup>56</sup>*Mañjarī-sādhana* is a unique form of *mādhurya-rasa* in which the *sādhaka* assumes the identity of a *mañjarī*, or a youthful female servant. A *mañjarī* is a kind of *gopī*, usually between the ages of 12 and 16, and is under the care of a main *sakhī*, such as Lalitā or Viśākhā. The *mañjarī* serves the needs of both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by serving betel nut, bringing water, fanning, combing and braiding hair, massaging, entertaining with music and dance, and so on. The *mañjarī* is technically a servant of one of Rādhā's friends, but everyone in Rādhā's group is a Rādhā *dāsī* (servant), so even by serving the *sakhī*, the *sevā* ultimately is aimed at Rādhā and Krishna. Śrī Rādhā considers the *mañjarīs* to be extensions of Her own body and therefore allows them to be present at more intimate times.

<sup>57</sup>KS, *Samhitā* 10/12: *sāragrāhī bhajana kṛṣṇaṁ yoṣit-bhāvāśrite 'tmani/ viravat kurute bāhye śarīraṁ karma nityaśaḥ//*

<sup>58</sup>HC, 15/27, p. 153: *sādhite ujjala rasa, āche bhāva ekādaśa, sambandha, vayasa, nāma, rūpa/ yūtha, veśa, ājñā, vāsa, sevā, parākāṣṭhāśvāsa, pālya-dāsī ei aparūpa//*

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 15/28, p. 154: *ei ekādaśa bhāva sampūrṇa sādhanā/ pañca-daśa lakṣya haya sādha-ka-jīvaṇa/ śravaṇa, varaṇa, āra smaraṇa, āpana/ sampatti e-pañca-vidha daśāya gaṇana//*

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 15/ 29, p. 155: *nijāpekṣā śreṣṭha-suddha-bhāvuka ye jana/ bhāva-mārga gurudeva sei mahājana// tāñhāra śrīmukhe bhāva-tattvera śravaṇa/ haile śravaṇa daśā haya prakāṭana// bhāva-tattva dvi-prakāra karaha vicāra/ nija ekādaśa bhāva, kṛṣṇa-līlā āra/*

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., *rādhā-kṛṣṇa aṣṭakāla sei līlā kare/ tāhāra śravaṇe lobha haya atahpare// lobha haile gurupade jijñāsā udaya/ kemaṇe pāiba līlā kaha mahāśaya// gurudeva kṛpā kari' karibe varṇana/ līlā-tattve ekādaśa bhāva-saṅghaṭana// prasanna haiyā prabhu karibe ādeśa/ ei bhāve līlā madhye karaha praveśa// suddha-rupe siddha-bhāva kariyā śravaṇa/ sei bhāva svīya citte karibe varaṇa//*

<sup>62</sup>HC, 15/30, p. 156: *varaṇa-kālete nija ruci vicāriyā/ gurupade jānāibe sarala haiyā, prabhu, tumi kṛpā kari' yei paṇicaya dile more tāhe mora pūrṇa prīti haya// svabhāvata mora ei bhāve āche ruci/ ataeva ājñā śire dhari haye śuci//*

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 15/30, p. 157: *ruci yadi nahe tabe akapaṭa mane/ nivedibe nija ruci śrīguru-carāṇe// vicāriyā gurudeva dibe anyabhāva/ tāhe ruci haile prakāśibe nija-bhāva//*

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 15/31, p. 158: *śrī-guru-carāṇe paḍi balibe takhana/ tavādiṣṭa bhāva āmi karinu varaṇa// e-bhāva kakhana āmi nā chāḍiba āra/ jīvane maraṇe ei saṅgī ye āmāra//*

<sup>65</sup>In fact, the *paddhatis* do not describe how *siddha-praṇālī* is given. The only indications that Dhyānacandra makes in this regard occur when he uses the terms “*guru-prasāda-janani*” (vs. 87, p. 28) “born from the mercy of Guru” and “*guru-dattam*” (vs. 108, p. 32) “given by the guru.” It seems that the *paddhatis* only describe how the *sādhaka* meditates, not how he gets *siddha-praṇālī*.

<sup>66</sup>David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 119-121.

<sup>67</sup>HC, 115.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 15/32, p. 158: *nija siddha ekādaśabhāve vratī haye/smaribe sudṛḍha-citte nija-bhāvacye// smarāṇe vicāra eka āche ta' sundara/ āpanera yogya-smṛti kara niran-tara// āpanera ayogya smarāṇa yadi haya/ bahu yuga sādḥileo siddhi kabhu naya//*

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 15/33, p. 158: *āpana-sādhane smṛti yabe ha'ye vratī/ acire āpana-daśā haya siddha ati// nija siddha-bhāvera ye niran-tara smṛti/ tāhe dūra haya śighra jaḍa-bad-dha-mati//*

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 15/36, p. 162: *samādhi-svarūpa smṛti ye samaye haya/ bhāvāpana daśā āsi' haibe udaya// sei kāle nija siddha-deha abhimāna/ parājiyā jaḍa-deha ha'be adhiṣṭhāna// takhana svarūpe vraja-vāsa kṣaṇe kṣaṇa/*

<sup>71</sup>We believe that there is reasonable grounds to accept that the Bengali handwriting from the *dikṣā-patra* is that of Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda. If this is the case, the document is likely a memorandum written by Bhaktivinoda on the basis of what his guru told him. In my dissertation I include a sample of known handwriting from Bhaktivinoda's *Svalikhita-jīvanī* that may allow a basis for comparison. Regardless of the authorship of the document, however, the information that it contains agrees with the description of how Bhaktivinoda himself describes his *siddha-deha* in his *Siddhi-*

*lālasā*. See below.

<sup>72</sup>We should also note Narottama Dāsa's warning that, "One should be careful not to mention the details of one's *bhajana* in public." In spite of this, evidence of Bhaktivinoda's personal *siddha-deha* appears throughout his songs.

<sup>73</sup>Kedarnath Dutta Bhaktivinoda, *Gītā-mālā*, ed. Śrīla Bhaktikusuma Sramana (Sridham Mayapur, Nadiya: Shri Caitanya Math), 498 Śrī-gaurābda: *Siddhi-lālasā* VIII/1-4; IX/1-3. (Translations by Haridhāma Dāsa.)

*varaṇe taḍit, bāsa tārābalī,  
kamalā mañjarī nāma  
sāḍe vārā varṣa vayasa satata,  
svānanda-sukhada-dhāma* (1)

*karpūra sevā, lalitāra gaṇa  
rādhā yūtheśvarī hana  
mameśvarī-nātha, śrī nandanandana  
āmāra parāṇa dhana* (2)

*śrī rūpa mañjarī, prabhīrā sama,  
yugala sevāya āsa  
avaśya se rūpa, sevā pābo āmi  
parākāṣṭhā suviśvāsa* (3)

*kabe bā e dāsī, saṁsiddhi lābhibe,  
rādhā-kuṇḍe bāsa karī'  
rādhā-kṛishna-sevā satata karibe,  
purva smṛti parihari'* (4)

*vṛṣabhānu-sutā, caraṇa sevane,  
haibo je pāyadāsī  
śrī rādhāra sukha, satata sādhanē,  
rahibo āmi prayāsī* (1)

*śrī rādhāra sukhe, kṛṣṇera je sukha,  
jānibo manete āmi  
rādhā-pada chāḍī', śrī kṛṣṇa-saṅgame,  
kabhu nā haibo kāmī* (2)

*sakhī-gaṇa mama, parama suhṛt,  
yugala-premera guru  
tad anuga ha'ye, sevibo rādhāra,  
caraṇa kalpa-taru* (4/3)

## THE FUTURE OF ISKCON

A Conversation Between Steven J. Rosen

and E. Burke Rochford, Jr.

(Interview, 1992)

**Rosen:** Lord Chaitanya predicted a Golden Age for the next ten thousand years. ISKCON and Prabhupāda's books, specifically, are supposed to survive, even thrive, for that period. But then the Kali age really sets in, and intense degradation becomes more and more prominent. In the interim period, however, devotees are convinced that ISKCON will flourish. But in exactly what form? This is open to question. So, first of all, how do you feel about this notion of ISKCON flourishing or abiding? Do you think it will?

**Rochford:** We must acknowledge that the movement will exist—it has staying power. That's for certain. I think the bigger questions involve the form, because the movement has already gone through several serious transition periods. But the movement has definitely shown that it's here to stay. There's a nice segment by sociologist Rosabeth Kanter who, in her book *Commitment and Community* talks about communes in the nineteenth century. She looks at ninety-one such movements who've left historical records, and it's interesting because less than a dozen were able to survive twenty-five years, or a single generation. And the majority lasted less than four years. So, one thing we have to understand, as a starting point, is that this movement has lasted well beyond the average life expectancy of such organizations. It has without a doubt shown its ability to endure.

**Rosen:** Well, then, let's begin like this: just *why* has ISKCON endured? To what would you attribute its longevity?

**Rochford:** I think we can point to a couple of things. First of all, I think we can look at its strong, deep religious tradition—its roots in the Gauḍiya Vaishnava heritage. Then we can also look at the ways in which that tradi-



tion has been passed on over the course of time such that those who take it up are transformed, or altered, in terms of consciousness—the richness of its theology and practice. These are formidable considerations.

In fact, of those nineteenth-century communes that Kanter had investigated, the majority of those that had endured were religious. So, wherever you see this sort of all-encompassing ideology, especially where there is a societal plan with a deep theological background, you see the prospects for success being that much greater.

**Rosen:** I guess there are many reasons for this, the foremost being spiritual. But I think that from a strictly sociological point of view, it might be said that such communities are more likely to be successful because they unify people around a common goal.

**Rochford:** Exactly. It presents a sense of common purpose for people. Also, relating it to the 'spiritual' reasons you were alluding to—and this is especially the case with ISKCON—people have experienced advancement in their pursuit of God. In other words, the movement gives what is promised. It's that simple, really. There's little question as to whether the practice of Krishna consciousness works—you've got people who have been devotees for over twenty years. They're getting something from this. You've had centuries of Gaudiya Vaishnavas in India—and tens of thousands (if not millions) today—who also have adhered to the process of Krishna consciousness and derived spiritual satisfaction. So this cannot be ignored. The primary reason for an enduring community is time-tested proof that the goals of that community are attainable and valuable. ISKCON has shown this beyond any reasonable doubt, at least for an informed observer.

**Rosen:** Let's return for a moment to Kanter's study. Of the few communal groups who had staying power, how many went through radical transformations? I mean, longevity is important, but if a given group, especially a religious group, departs from its initial goals . . .

**Rochford:** Most of them did undergo change. And these are far-reaching. Some movements remained true to their traditional form. Others have become transformed in the sense that they've taken on a sort of accommodationist stance in regard to the world, or the larger society. But they, too, remain true to their religious principles and vows in some manner. And

then there are other religious groups that went through tremendous transformations, becoming big business enterprises and worldly concerns—a total transformation. Such groups often retain some semblance of their religious elements, but as a secondary concern.

**Rosen:** Do you think, perhaps, at one time the danger was that such a fate could have befallen ISKCON? In the mid-seventies, when the movement was more financially stable, we could just as easily become another big business, wouldn't you say?

**Rochford:** Some say it could have happened. But I don't think so. And history has shown that it didn't happen. I think the primary reason for this is the fact that ISKCON money was always going into the printing of religious books, the distribution of sacred food, temples, and things of this nature. The money from the *saikīrtana* was not used, at least not for the most part, in making a comfortable, material life for people. It went directly back into the religious concerns. So this is an important factor.

In one sense, though, this is all ancient history, although economics is still a critical factor for the movement. In fact, it may be more important now than ever before. ISKCON, at this point, doesn't really have a stable, viable economic infrastructure. This distinguishes it from similar communities, and it should be a critical concern. It can affect the form the movement takes in the years ahead. Householders, for instance, are finding, more and more, that they have to go out and get jobs or set up private businesses. This is now accepted, by and large, by the community of devotees.

Working outside, of course, was also accepted ten or twelve years ago, but it was the exception rather than the rule. Such things would have more generally been perceived as *māyā*, or 'illusion,' with only very rare exceptions. Now, I think this accommodationist view is a sign that the movement is developing in a healthy way, but there are dangers too. And this is clearly the problem that is perceived by 'the purists,' if you will. They don't want to compromise the tradition, which is valid. So, there's a tension developing, and we'll have to see the way in which devotees deal with this.

These developments, by the way, present a potentially dramatic effect on the movement in terms of what its course is going to be. It's bringing devotees into the outside world in a rather full way—they have to work side-by-side with people who do not share their beliefs and sense of commitment. So that can have its effect. But on the other side, devotees can now preach

to people with whom they wouldn't have ordinarily come into contact, and in a profound way. Not only with words, but with an example of how to be Krishna conscious in what these people consider to be 'the real world.' This is important: if the only example ISKCON can set is that of cloistered monks, you're going to lose a whole segment of society that could otherwise seriously respond to what you have to say.

You know, taken within the context of earlier Vedic tradition, this could all be seen as the unfolding of the Varnashrama system. Initially, Prabhupāda wanted to create *brāhmaṇas*, an intellectual class, to guide society and, clearly, a lot of the early devotees did see themselves in this way, even if many of them lacked the necessary qualifications. Then, again, many were qualified, and have shown it over the years. The point I want to make, though, is that this was a natural place for Prabhupāda to start: his first and foremost concern was to create a society that had God in the center. This necessitated the making of *brāhmaṇas*—people who see spirituality as the most prominent part of their lives.

In Prabhupāda's wisdom, he emphasized this as the paramount thing, knowing that once he had a class of *brāhmaṇas*, the movement would be established on a strong foundation, and the other classes would grow out of that. Therefore he intimated that 50% of his work was left undone—the natural unfolding of the Varnashrama system. And as time goes on, Varnashrama organically unfolds. In fact, we see that some devotees are performing brahminical work, but others are going out and finding work that suits them most. You have lawyers, farmers, businessmen—the whole nine yards. This diversity can create a stable economic and social base for the movement.

In fact, ISKCON requires this if it is to become what sociologists call 'institutionally complete.' Anyway, diversity of employment or occupation is a step in this direction, even if it's not necessarily the Varnashrama system proper. Actually, it's a facsimile of Varnashrama that is just beginning to rear its head in ISKCON. I wonder, as the movement grows and learns to accommodate this, will it turn into the actual Varnashrama ideal that we've read so much about? So it opens new doors . . .

**Rosen:** Many devotees will naturally find themselves going in this direction as they mature both physically and spiritually, and so they should be ready for this and know how to deal with it.

**Rochford:** Definitely. Now that the boundary between ISKCON and the outside world is more flexible and fluid, there's potential to really grow. The old idea that 'you're a monk or you're in *māyā*' has more or less seen its day. Devotees are assimilating, or maturing, as you say. And it's interesting to look at the factors that were instrumental in this. First, you have a decline in book distribution and the selling of paraphernalia; you have devotees growing older and developing the need to take care of their families. Again, the economic factor. Devotees were left without alternatives. When books and incense were on the decline . . .

**Rosen:** I think this had a lot to do with the time. In the late sixties and early seventies, exotic Indian religion, incense, and things of this nature, were in vogue. As the seventies came to an end, so did the popularity of many of these items, things associated with Krishna consciousness.

**Rochford:** Right. And then you had the anti-cult movement, which really gained ground in the late seventies. That really affected *saṅkīrtana*—especially in America. People became suspicious of the devotees and all so-called cults. So a new economic base was needed for a variety of reasons. And many devotees, out of necessity, took to working in the outside world. Now, it can be said that some of these devotees are not strict practitioners, but I don't think that this is a fair appraisal. Of course, some of them are not strict but, then again, some of those who continue to live inside the temple are not strict. It is very much an individual thing.

You know, I visited one temple recently for a Maṅgal-aratik service at 4:15 a.m., and I witnessed what I'm sure was a minority representation of the community of devotees—and I suspect this is true in most North American temples. Now, what does this mean? Well, the purists would say that the people who don't attend all of the services are in *māyā*, but I think it runs a little deeper than that. Many purists may not have a nine-to-five job. Or they may not have a family to raise. To be involved in one's family, in the way that is required, is no easy task. It takes a lot of time and energy. But if one takes on that responsibility, he has to do it correctly. So this has to be considered. Such a devotee's service, or involvement, will have to change.

A sincere devotee will naturally have some modicum of an early morning service, simulating what goes on in the temple or actually attending part of the temple functions. But it is unrealistic to expect that a householder, living outside, with tons of responsibilities, should have the same require-

ments that a monk inside will have. Of course, at this point, devotees will run to their *Bhagavad-gītā* and show a million 'Prabhupāda saids.' But the plain fact is that the movement is evolving, and Prabhupāda clearly expected this. It evolved constantly while he was here, and it continues to evolve in his physical absence.

**Rosen:** Yes, and even Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura, in his *Bhaktyaloka*, and elsewhere, prescribes very different duties for monks and for married people—he almost makes it look like two different religions . . .

**Rochford:** Very interesting. Well, clearly, the economic needs of the devotees, and their requirements as people, as we've shown, are clearly different than they were in the days when Prabhupāda was here, and the purists have to accept this. You see, the purists and the accommodationists can either benefit from, or suffocate, each other. It's up to them. With the cautions exerted by the purists, the accommodationists can spread Krishna consciousness into the world. And with the financial, preaching, festivities, and sheer numbers support of the accommodationists, the core members of the institution can carry on their grassroots activities.

**Rosen:** I see that. It's going on already, to some degree. This is definitely the direction we're heading in. We say, 'Prabhupāda built a house in which the whole world could live.' And we're working to realize that goal. But there are problems.

**Rochford:** Yes. But without belaboring the finer points of the issue, I think the problems can be solved rather simply. If devotees both inside and outside the temple learn to communicate more, and to have mutual respect, Prabhupāda's vision could be achieved. Of course, this is more difficult than it seems. Nonetheless, the importance of devotee relationships cannot be overstated. And, if I'm not mistaken, this is now a much vocalized point among the reformers in the movement.

**Rosen:** That's right. But this is related to older, long-standing problems. I'm talking about the rift between ascetics and householders. In fact, the tension between monks and married people is an old one. It existed in India for some time, and was even seen in the Gauḍīya Maṭha (ISKCON's parent institution). But, despite this tension Gauḍīya Vaishnavism, from the

time of Mahāprabhu to the present day, has accommodated householders. To start the movement in the West, Prabhupāda emphasized monastic life. Of course, I'm not saying that this emphasis would have necessarily shifted but as devotees matured, and began to work and raise families, I think he would have structured the organization to accommodate these things in a more grassroots kind of way. Emphasis on in-house businesses, gurukula, and these kinds of things.

If you look at the history of our *sampradāya*, there has always been a large contingent of householders, even among the greatest devotees. Most of Mahāprabhu's associates. Bhaktivinode Thākura, the great teacher in our line that I mentioned earlier, was the father of ten children, a court magistrate, and a prolific writer. Now, his lifestyle was quite different than the monks of his time, but he was also a respected devotee—a devotee of the highest order.

I see it as a question of maturity. Mature purists, to use your term, will embrace householders—trying to understand or even appreciating their different lifestyle—and work with them to spread Krishna consciousness. And mature householders, who largely fit into what you call the accommodationist category, will work with the monks and do their level best to come up to standard.

**Rochford:** This is required if the movement is to survive. Well, it will survive in any case. But this is required if the movement is to prosper. And look at the example you mentioned—Bhaktivinode. His co-workers would have seen in him an upright, honest, ethical citizen, who is contributing to the world both materially and spiritually. Clearly, not everyone will contribute in this all-consuming way. But his example is significant. Such a class of devotees, in some sense at least, offers an even better example than their renunciant counterparts. They are clearly in the world, but not of it. This impresses people, at times, on a much deeper level. It's something they can relate to, and it makes Krishna consciousness appear practical, something that has value for them in their present state. And something that's accessible, too.

I think one thing that needs to be discussed is the subject of role models, both for purists and for accommodationists. Again, you mentioned Bhaktivinode—a perfect role model, in a sense, for both. And then there's certainly Śrīla Prabhupāda. But the onus now falls squarely on the shoulders of Prabhupāda's disciples. Good, thoughtful leadership is called for . . .

**Rosen:** Let me read you something that was written by a sociologist named Stuart Wright: "Commitment to a movement characterized by charismatic leadership emerges out of an investment of 'trust' made by members. One problem all world-transforming movements face is that followers need to be convinced that movement leaders are legitimate embodiments or representatives of moral truths and, therefore, worthy of their sacrifice and dedication. If, however, invested loyalty or trust is betrayed through actions that are perceived as morally inconsistent with espoused ideals or goals, the likelihood of defection is increased."

This interests me and dictates, perhaps, the next course of our discussion. ISKCON thrived under Prabhupāda's guidance and personal example. Soon after his departure, things started to get difficult, to say the least. It seems that the onus really is on the current leaders of ISKCON to set high examples . . .

**Rochford:** It has to be there in any movement, and doubly in this one, if for no other reason than the overwhelming centrality of the guru/disciple relationship. So all senior devotees have an obligation to set a high standard, but this obligation is especially poignant for those who are set up as gurus—they must embody the ideals, or else people will simply leave the movement.

There is, of course, the phenomenon of seeing Krishna consciousness as larger than the institution and even larger than the relationship with one's own guru. In that case devotees who have problem-gurus, shall we say, will stay within the fold of Krishna consciousness. They will go on with their practices and take recourse in Prabhupāda and his teachings, eventually taking shelter, perhaps, of one of Prabhupāda's more exemplary disciples. But such things are rare, and the more common case scenario is that a disenchanted disciple will simply leave the movement to pursue a more materialistic life.

In ISKCON today, though, there is a sense of connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda and, through him, the whole Gauḍīya tradition. So disenchanted devotees would do well to nurture this relationship in addition to the relationship with his or her individual guru, or through his or her guru. That way, if there is some betrayal of trust—if the guru falls away from the movement—the disciple still has Prabhupāda, whose instruction is the embodiment of the entire philosophy, and the entire process of Krishna consciousness. Do you agree?

**Rosen:** Absolutely. Traditionally, this is called *ācārya-puruṣa*—everyone is linked to the pure representative of Krishna, to the founder of a particular lineage. In our case, Prabhupāda is the founder/*ācārya* of ISKCON—so everyone in the institution should have a direct relationship with him. This is not to say that one is not linked through one's guru, or that one does not honor one's guru, but the *ācārya* is of central importance to everyone in the institution. The relationship with one's guru is dependent upon the guru's relationship with Prabhupāda. This is *parampara*. This is the way a Vaishnava lineage works. In this way there is a common interest for all disciples and, as we've discussed, this enables an institution to grow and prosper.

**Rochford:** This is the point. I know there's some controversy about *ritvik* and *diksha*, and things of that sort. That's not what I'm talking about here. I'm talking about a very pragmatic connection. It's real. No matter who one's initiating guru is, an ISKCON devotee is distinctly related to Prabhupāda—a Prabhupāda follower.

**Rosen:** We call it a "Prabhupād-ānuga"!

**Rochford:** Right. And while we're talking about the importance of leadership, I want to say that I think there is some trouble in ISKCON today. Leaders are not what they once were. Maybe it's because they are feeling Prabhupāda's absence, I don't know.

**Rosen:** Well, it really varies. There's strong leadership in some parts of the movement . . .

**Rochford:** Oh, I'm generalizing, without doubt. I'm speaking mainly about the movement in America. That was the subject of my dissertation and the area in which I've conducted the most elaborate amount of research. But, no, I'm aware of the success, especially in parts of India, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It's phenomenal. Since Prabhupāda's departure, the movement has tripled in those places. And it continues to grow in South America, too. But there is clearly a problem in America. The devotees there, by and large, are not as inspired as they once were.

There are a lot of reasons for this. One reason may simply be a reflection of age. Devotees are older, with families, and their concerns are shifting. In some ways, their commitment to Krishna consciousness may be deeper than



ever before. But externally, they don't appear to have the zealotry of bygone days. Their time is spent with the family or at work. We've discussed this already. Even the people who are joining the movement today, though, do not seem to have the same spirit as the devotees I met when I first started studying ISKCON, some fifteen years ago. A lot of young people today have hardly even heard of the movement, much less desire to join it.

**Rosen:** Well, there is the straight-edge phenomenon, you know. I was discussing this with J. Stillson Judah some time ago. He asked me about the young people today and if they still join for the same reasons as when I joined the movement, almost twenty years ago. I told him that the kids of today are very different, and I had these straight-edge kids in mind. They join the movement because it gives theological legitimization to practices they already hold dear. For example, straight-edge kids are mostly celibate, they avoid intoxication, and they are determined vegetarians. Naturally, Krishna consciousness is appealing to them. They're already in the mode of goodness, and so they're attracted to the lifestyle of the devotees. Not surprisingly, more and more of these kids are joining the movement. So I'm not sure if I'd agree with you . . .

**Rochford:** No, I'm not saying that. There's a good clientele out there. But I don't think the devotees are responding as quickly as they should. Or, at least, they're not responding as quickly as they would have, say, ten or twelve years ago. This is definitely the case in America. You know, I used to be able to ask my students, an entire class, 'How many of you have had a face-to-face encounter with a Hare Krishna?' Practically all hands would rise—every student had a story to tell. Over the years, however, this has happened less and less, and now few have had direct contact with the devotees. So there's a problem with the movement in America, and, in my estimation, a lot of it can be traced to poor leadership. Book distribution is down, Harināma, public chanting, is down.

Now, part of this has to do with the economic situation, age, leadership etc., as we already discussed, but there are other factors as well. Some devotees say that things started going downhill once Prabhupāda departed. But, if truth be told, book distribution and other things started to decline a couple of years prior to that. And I think the end of the sixties and early seventies—with its hippiedom, exotic Indian religion, incense, etc., was one of the factors.

Still, things started to deteriorate even before Prabhupāda left. It's interesting, isn't it? The days of annually doubling book distribution scores and the millions of books sold started to taper off by 1976. It wasn't as bad as it was to become in the eighties, but there was a clear decline. And so devotees started to go out on *saṅkīrtana* as Santa Claus and distribute records and paraphernalia even while Prabhupāda was still here! So these were the beginnings of the economic difficulties for ISKCON.

**Rosen:** Of course, instead of solving the problems these things exacerbated the situation, and devotees were perceived as entrepreneurs—just out to make a buck. Even for the devotees who were honest and relatively straightforward, it started to look bad. 'Devotees as Santa Claus? Just see how deceptive these devotees are!' But the Santa Claus thing started in good spirit, using the holiday season to distribute the message of God. And Prabhupāda supported it! Unfortunately, it was eventually abused by opportunistic devotees, and so the suspicions of already skeptical non-devotees seemed justified.

**Rochford:** Exactly. In a sense, it couldn't have been worse. The short-term gain was not worth the long-term consequences. I don't think there's any question about this. And these things developed independently of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance. Whether he was here or not, these things were going on. And then with the anti-cult movement and the Robin George Case, the defection of New Vrindavan, bad or bogus gurus, bad or bogus media—Americans, by and large, came to mistrust the devotees.

The anti-cult movement became a viable force in America, especially in the mid-to-late seventies. That's when they were at their strongest, which means that they were spreading their own propaganda about ISKCON and other new religious movements. So they were, in a sense, shaping public opinion. The press obviously helped them along the way. As a result, people were already gaining a sense of distrust and even began to think that the movement was dangerous in some way. This was going on while Prabhupāda was here.

The other thing we have to look at is the devotees themselves. In some cases, you had inexperienced, if well-meaning, devotees, who acted like anything but Vaishnavas while out on *saṅkīrtana*. This is not to say, of course, that there weren't many sincere devotees out there—and still are—who were doing it properly with compassion and the correct religious atti-

tude. But let's face it, there were many overzealous devotees who were just trying to rake in the bucks. Some did it 'to please Prabhupāda'; others did it for name and glory; still others, I'm sure, did it for their own profitable ends. But it created a bad name for the movement. A growing public hostility was taking place—an unfortunate hostility. So there are a lot of factors that are working together to make things difficult for the devotees here in the States.

Hopefully, American devotees have learned their lessons well and will not make the same mistakes. They can learn from their past and from the Indian community as well. Here's a prime example of how to pursue Krishna consciousness in a tangible but sophisticated way. I think the example of the Indian people is significant and fits very neatly with the paradigm we've set up of accommodationist devotees. But this is a touchy subject.

**Rosen:** How so?

**Rochford:** Well, for starters, I don't think there's any doubt that the East-Indian people will continue to have a significant role in the movement. Now, there are many sides to this issue. I think initially at least, Indians were brought in more as a strategic consideration than anything else. With the anti-cult movement labelling ISKCON 'a cult,' something had to be done. The logical and most natural move at this point was to affirm the long-standing assumption that ISKCON was part of the Hindu heritage. Thus, it's not a cult by the prevalent definition.

The fact is, however, that ISKCON sees itself as Sanātana Dharma and it sees Hinduism as a sectarian religion, possibly having its origins in Sanātana Dharma but nonetheless a separate phenomenon. Leaving all these technicalities aside for a moment, one fact remains: ISKCON doesn't really see itself as Hindu and so many see this identification as little more than a strategic move. However, there's enough historical and ideological evidence to associate ISKCON with Hinduism and so the identification can wash with the legal system: ISKCON is part of Hinduism. Fine. It has a neat label. But what happened is interesting. As more Indians started to identify the ISKCON temples as their own, both they and the devotees started to see that the two groups could benefit from each other.

**Rosen:** In fact, this was one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's plans. He wanted to popularize Krishna consciousness in the West because people in other parts of

the world generally try to emulate the things they see going on here. He thought that Indians would get more serious about Vaishnava spirituality if they saw Westerners taking it seriously. Which is exactly what happened.

Jack Hawley, a professor of religion at Columbia University, calls it 'the pizza effect,' an idea that, I understand, arose with Agehananda Bharati. Most people assume that pizza originated in Italy. It didn't—it originated in America. But now it's popular in Italy as well. So ISKCON, as a distinct institution, originated in the States—but it had a huge effect in making India and Indians Krishna conscious.

Of course, Prabhupāda wanted East-Indian involvement, and as early as 1970 he created the Life Membership program. But he wanted it to be clear that we were not teaching Hinduism, at least as it's presently understood. We were not supporters of polytheism or the caste system nor were we, in an ultimate sense, to be identified with any sectarian religion. But Hindus were like our close relatives . . .

**Rochford:** Right. Anyway, the alliance between the devotees and the Indian community initially gained strength as a result of the efforts of the anti-cult movement. So this sort of came in through the back door, if you will. But it's an important merger of interests. The Indians came to the devotees' rescue: 'Oh, when you attack ISKCON, you're attacking Hinduism.' And the devotees, for their part, established Vaishnava temples and explained Vedic texts and culture with renewed enthusiasm. So they helped each other.

**Rosen:** Another way in which East-Indians help ISKCON is related to our initial conversation about the growth of ISKCON and its accommodationist direction. Most Indians who consider Krishna consciousness their religion live outside the temple, have jobs, family. So they provide an example of how to pursue Krishna consciousness in the world which, as we've said, is becoming more and more a part of the ISKCON lifestyle.

**Rochford:** Precisely. East-Indians have traditionally supported ISKCON with funds—that's the life membership program. But why were they able to do so? Because they have jobs and such. So they provide an essential model for ISKCON devotees, especially since ISKCON is naturally growing in the ways we've mentioned. If ISKCON devotees—and by this I especially mean the householders—follow the lead of the well-established Indian members, it can decrease, if not put an end to, ISKCON's economic problems.

This is not just for householders, but for all those who want to keep jobs or make financial contributions. As you know, the Indian community is becoming more and more involved as full-time practitioners, advisers and managers of the movement; so they will naturally be a tremendous resource for ISKCON's future needs. I think they're also being accepted more in the devotee community. It seemed to me, some fifteen years ago, that devotees shunned the Hindu world.

**Rosen:** Well, I think the problem stemmed from this: most Hindus did not want a twenty-year-old American telling them about something they deemed to be their own religion. In other words: 'Who are *you* to be telling me about an Indian religion? I come from India.' But over the course of time, I think the Hindus began to see that devotees *did* know more about the tradition (they learned Sanskrit and Bengali) or, at the very least, they seemed more committed to it and won Hindu acceptance because of that.

On the other side, I think devotees were humbled by having to align themselves with Hindus due to the anti-cult antagonism, and also because of the economic problem—here were people who knew how to make money and use it in Krishna's service. So devotees came to respect Hindus and the experience they had to offer.

**Rochford:** Nicely put. But let's consider a potential problem. As East-Indians become more involved in ISKCON, what is the danger that Prabhupāda's movement might become another ethnic church? Of course, it is more likely they will be accepted into ISKCON like everybody else, and because they accept the principles and teachings expressed in Prabhupāda's books they will not fall into the ethnic pitfall that so many religions have. 'You're not that body' is, of course, a simple straightforward teaching of ISKCON. So, although the danger is there, I would trust that it's not likely.

**Rosen:** I don't think it's likely to be a problem. The leadership of the movement is very cautious about this, and anyone who makes it into ISKCON management knows the philosophy well enough to avoid such pitfalls. Anyway, only time will tell.

**Rochford:** Indeed, that's true. Still, a lot depends on devotee interaction and the way in which they deal with the Indian community in the next few years. It should be an enlightening experience for all concerned. Actually,

the involvement of the Indian community is something that will occur quite naturally. Perhaps a more immediate thing to deal with, however, is the ongoing tension between purist and accommodationist factions in ISKCON.

There are definite ways that devotees can deal with this, as we have discussed. Yet there are also ways that a fanatical purist view could be detrimental, and I think ISKCON history has shown that.

**Rosen:** Can you give some examples of things devotees should watch out for as the accommodationist view becomes more and more prevalent?

**Rochford:** Well, to give some very brief examples: if devotees assimilate too well they will, in a sense, minimize the urgency of establishing the Varnashrama system. There will be virtually no need for it, at least as a formal institution. If devotees take advantage of the already existing infrastructure of the material world, in terms of work etc., they will not find the need to establish modes of employment within the confines of the movement, which will remain a small, economically inefficient society. So that's one potential problem. Related to this is the problem of gurukula. If devotees make use of outside schools, they will never feel the urgency to develop the gurukula system, which *should* be developed, even if it has a problematic history in ISKCON. So these are the types of problems.

Now, I'm not saying that these are necessarily bad things. Perhaps it is in this way that economic and educational facilities will unfold for ISKCON. No one really knows at this point. But these things have to be thought about and openly discussed. Should devotee children be educated outside? Maybe—ISKCON doesn't have the same resources as outside institutions. The children can perhaps be educated outside but given their spiritual education in the home. Even so, there are critically important trade-offs involved. And these may put ISKCON's young, and ISKCON itself, at risk.

Nor are there vast numbers of job opportunities within ISKCON. Devotees are learning to make use of the larger 'outside' institutions, and perhaps this will lead to compromise—or maybe it will simply lead to increased preaching opportunities. Maybe devotees will work outside of ISKCON but their dedication to ISKCON will not diminish in the slightest. That's certainly possible. But the purists will not accept it and they will see this as undermining the values of the institution. So, how to balance these things?

The movement needs to recognize that both these points of view are valid

and have a place in Krishna consciousness. What's more, they are not isolated but represent a continuum—these are gray areas in which every devotee will find himself from time to time. It's not that one devotee is a purist and another is accommodationist. Not at all. Every devotee periodically drifts from one of these worldviews into the other. The future of ISKCON rests on exactly how the institution, as a whole, finds a balance.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Guy L. Beck** went to India in early 1976 to pursue formal training in Hindustani classical vocal music and Bengali *kīrtana*, remaining in Calcutta for five years. After completing academic degrees in Indian music, and giving several public performances, he returned to America for an M.A. in Religious Studies (1982) from the University of South Florida. This was followed by further graduate work at Syracuse University, earning an M.A. in Musicology (1986) and a Ph.D in Religion (1989). Dr. Beck then taught eastern religions, mysticism, and religion and music at Louisiana State University from 1990–95, during which time he also returned to North India for a year on a Fulbright Grant to conduct extensive research on temple music traditions. While in India, he appeared on Doordarshan (Indian TV), and gave a number of lectures and recitals. His book entitled *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (University of South Carolina Press, 1993). He is currently teaching in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, where he continues to maintain his research interests in religion and music.

**Charles R. Brooks** is author of *Hare Krishnas in India* (Princeton University Press, 1989). He is currently teaching Indian Religion at Fashion Institute in New York as well as Anthropology at City University of New York. His special area of study is mystical experience in the Hare Krishna movement, especially as practiced in Vrindaban. His articles and books have established him as one of the western world's preeminent authorities on the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

**Gerald T. Carney** teaches South Asian religions at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, where he is Professor of Religion. His articles on Vaiṣṇava devotional aesthetics and interreligious dialogue have appeared in the *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies*, in the *Journal of Dharma*, in the volume *Vaiṣṇavism:*



*Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauḍīya Tradition* (ed., Steven Rosen, Motilal Banarsidass, 1994, reprint) and in a forthcoming volume of critical essays on the thought of Raimundo Panikkar. He was recently on sabbatical leave in India completing research on a biography of Bābā Premānanda Bhārati.

**Travis Chilcott** graduated with honors from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2001 with a B.A. in Religious Studies. In 2002 he received his Master's degree (MSt.) in the Study of Religion through the Faculty of Theology at Oxford University. Currently he is working on his Ph.D. in Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. His research is focused on the formation and early development of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition.

**Acyutānanda Dāsa** joined A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda in New York in the Summer of 1966 as one of his first initiated disciples. Acyutānanda then spent eleven years in India mastering Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *kīrtana*, *śāstra*, and language (Sanskrit and Bengali), while contributing scholarly papers to such important literary projects as the Madhvitē journal *Dharma Prakash* and the Vishva Hindu Parishad's *Viśva Dharma*. After returning to the United States, he produced several recordings of classical *bhajans* and composed *The Songs of the Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas* (Culver City: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), translating the devotional poetry of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

**Rahul Peter Das** studied Indology, Islamic Studies and Tamil at Cologne, Hamburg, Bonn and Kiel. M.A. (1981), Dr. phil. (1985) and Habilitation (1993) from Hamburg University. Special fields of interest: Vedic Studies, Āyurveda, Vṛkṣāyurveda, Bengali Studies (especially "folk" and syncretistic religions). From 1981 to 1994 engaged in research work in Āyurveda and Vṛkṣāyurveda at the Universities of Hamburg, Bonn and Groningen (Netherlands). Also taught Bengali and Sanskrit at Hamburg University during this time. Since 1994 professor for the philology of modern Indian languages at the University of Halle-Wittenberg. Numerous publications, conferences and lectures in Germany and abroad, most notably, *Essays on Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal* (Calcutta: KLM Firma, 1997).

**Ravindra Svarūpa Dāsa (William Deadwyler III)** holds a Ph.D. in religion from Temple University. His area of specialization was philosophy of reli-

gion. While in graduate school he encountered ISKCON devotees chanting on campus, and two years later (1971) he and his wife became initiated disciples of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Later the same year he became president of the Philadelphia ISKCON center. He completed his doctoral work in 1980 with a dissertation on Charles Hartshorne's conception of God. He now serves in ISKCON as an initiating guru and as a member of the Governing Body Commission.

**Shukavak Das** holds a M.A. in Sanskrit Grammar and a B.A. in Sanskrit Literature from the University of Toronto. He received his doctorate in South Asian Studies from the University of Toronto in June of 1996. His dissertation, entitled, "The Life and Thought of Kedarnath Dutta Bhaktivinode," is the result of twelve years of original research involving three trips to England and Bengal to gather first-hand information from government archives, Bengali villages and individuals' homes to locate essential evidence of Bhaktivinode Thakur's life and work. It was eventually published as *Hindu Encounter with Modernity* (Sri, 1999). During the last ten years Das has been working as a Hindu priest in Southern California. He spent fifteen years involved with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness movement while attending the University of Toronto.

**Neal Delmonico** received his doctoral degree from the University of Chicago (1990) in South Asian Languages and Civilizations. His dissertation was on the *rasa* theory of Rūpa Gosvāmin and his research has centered around Chaitanya Vaishnavism, Vedānta, and Sanskrit literary criticism. He has recently completed the *Nectar of the Holy Name*, a translation from Bengali of Manindranath Guha's classic work on the theology of the holy name in Chaitanya Vaiṣṇavism. In addition, he operates a small publishing company called "Blazing Sapphire Press," which specializes in scholarly studies and bilingual translations of some of the major works of Chaitanya Vaishnavism and of other important Indic intellectual and religious traditions.

**Jason D. Fuller** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. His primary area of research interest is modern Bengali religious and social history focusing on Vaishnava revivalist movements in the late nineteenth century. Recent works include "A Path Fraught With Danger: Reflections on Aṣṭāṅga Yoga from Bhaktivinode Thakura's *Prema Pradīpa*," JVS Vol. 14, No. 1 (Fall 2005), pp.

233-242; and "Re-membering the Tradition: Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's 'Sai-janaṭosani' and the Construction of a Middle-Class Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," in Antony Copley, ed., *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform, Hindutva, Gender, and Sampradaya* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 173-210.

**Tamal Krishna Goswami** (1946–2002) was an initiating spiritual master and Governing Body Commissioner of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. He has written numerous books, including *Servant of the Servant* and *The Final Pastimes of Śrīla Prabhupāda*. Regarding the intimate subject of this latter work, Goswami was preeminently qualified as its author, having been a close, personal secretary to A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda in 1977, just prior to Prabhupāda's demise. Reentering academia as an accomplished monk (*sannyāsin*), Goswami wrote numerous books and papers from a scholarly point of view and astonished his colleagues with his ability and determination. His posthumous Ph.D. dissertation on Prabhupāda as a premier Vaishnava theologian is currently being considered for publication by Columbia University Press.

**Ravi M. Gupta** is currently pursuing a D.Phil. in Theology at the University of Oxford, in association with the Oxford Centre for Vaishnava and Hindu Studies. His thesis focuses on the early development of Chaitanya Vaishnava Vedānta, as found in the writings of Jīva Gosvāmī. Ravi holds a master's degree in Religious Studies from Oxford, and a B.A. in Philosophy and Mathematics from Boise State University. He has delivered numerous presentations on Hinduism to both academic and interfaith audiences.

**Norvin J. Hein** has been studying Indian religion and culture for more than half a century, and in that time he has produced many important works, such as *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972; and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973). Among his many classic papers on Indian religion, perhaps his best known is "Caitanya's Ecstasies and the Theology of the Name," in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976; reprint 1982), which appears in this volume. Dr. Hein is currently Professor Emeritus of Comparative Religion at Yale University.

**Barbara A. Holdrege** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Chair of the

South Asian Studies Committee, and Director of the Center for the Analysis of Sacred Space at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her publications include *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (1996) and *Ritual and Power* (1990). She is currently completing three volumes, *Bhakti and Embodiment: At Play with Kṛṣṇa's Limitless Forms*, a multimedia digital volume, *From Geographic Place to Transcendent Space: Tracking Kṛṣṇa's Footprints in Vraja-Maṇḍala*, and an edited volume, *Beyond Hubert and Mauss: Reimagining Sacrifice in Hindu and Jewish Traditions*.

**E. H. Jarow (formerly Eric Huberman)** has been an Assistant Professor in History of Religions at Vassar College since 1995. He was previously a Mellon Fellow in the Humanities at Columbia University and a Fulbright Scholar in India. He has published widely on Indian religious literature and Vaishnavism. His latest work is entitled *Tales for the Dying: The Death Narrative of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003).

**Klaus K. Klostermaier** has written numerous books, including the popular textbook, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989; reprint, updated, 1994) and the much earlier personal reflection of his stay in Braj, *Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1969). He is Chairman and Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Manitoba, Canada.

**Dr Kim Knott** is a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Leeds, England. She has written *My Sweet Lord: The Hare Krishna Movement* (The Aquarian Press, 1986) and several articles on ISKCON, as well as many publications on Hinduism and other religions of South Asian communities outside India. Her recent research has focused on women in religions, particularly on women's views about destiny. As Honorary Secretary of the British Association for the Study of Religions she is interested in methodological issues in the discipline and in encouraging younger scholars to enter the field.

**June McDaniel's** Ph.D. thesis (University of Chicago) focused on *Bhāva* in Bengali religious and yogic traditions. This led to the writing of her first book, *Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (University of Chicago Press, 1989). She has also authored many articles on Gauḍīya Vaishnavism

and related subjects. She is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the College of Charleston, South Carolina.

**Howard J. Resnick (H.D. Goswami)** received his Ph.D. from Harvard University. An accomplished Sanskritist and Indologist, Resnick is now lecturing throughout the world at both religious and academic institutions on the depth and profundity of Vaishnavism. He has published numerous books in English, Spanish, and several other languages, and he was chosen to complete A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda's translation of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* on behalf of ISKCON's Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, which he did.

**E. Burke Rochford, Jr.**, is the author of *Hare Krishna in America* (Rutgers University Press, 1985), and over the past 25 years he has focused on the Hare Krishna movement, on which he has written numerous articles. His primary interest is the movement's development, particularly in relation to its school system (Gurukūla) and its social interaction with the western world. Rochford has been Professor of Sociology and Religion at Middlebury College since 1986.

**Kenneth Rose** studied at Bob Jones University and received a B.A. in philosophy from Ohio State University. After successfully preparing for the Unitarian Universalist ministry at Harvard Divinity School, he served as a ministerial intern at the First and Second Church (UUA) in Boston. Currently, he is Assistant Professor in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at Christopher Newport University in Virginia.

**Steven J. Rosen** is the author of numerous books on Vaishnava-related subjects. Having published with three of India's prominent publishers—Firma KLM (*Archeology and the Vaishnava Tradition: The Pre-Christian Roots of Krishna Worship*, Calcutta: 1989); Munshiram Manoharlal (*Passage From India: The Life and Times of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda*, Delhi: 1992); and Motilal Banarsidass (*Vaiṣṇavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauḍīya Tradition*, Delhi: 1994, reprint)—he has developed an important voice in the Indian religious community. He is an initiated disciple of Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*. His recent books include *Essential Hinduism* (Praeger, 2006) and *Black Lotus: The Spiritual Journey of an Urban Mystic* (Hari-Nama Press, 2007).

**Bruce N. Scharf (Brahmānanda Dāsa)** completed his studies in English literature at New York University and then became one of Prabhupāda's earliest disciples, being initiated in New York in September, 1966. Prabhupāda promptly appointed him the first ISKCON temple president. Brahmānanda supervised Prabhupāda's record album of Hare Krishna, which became popular amongst the youth of the counterculture. This led to Brahmānanda arranging the first western publication of Prabhupāda's books with MacMillan's edition of the *Bhagavad Gītā As It Is* with forewords by Allen Ginsberg, Thomas Merton, and Denise Levertov. With his own funds Brahmānanda then published Prabhupāda's *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, printed by the Dai Nippon Company in Japan, and also *Kṛṣṇa*, financed by George Harrison. He then organized ISKCON's first in-house printing press in Boston. Soon thereafter, Prabhupāda sent Brahmānanda to Africa, and he established preaching centers in over 15 countries. As a personal secretary, he travelled with Prabhupāda in India, America, and Europe. He now lives in Vrindavan, U.P., India.

**Graham M. Schweig** did his graduate studies at the University of Chicago and Harvard University and received his doctorate in Comparative Religion from the latter university. He is currently Associate Professor and Director of the Indic Studies Program in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Christopher Newport University and Visiting Associate Professor of Sanskrit in the Asian and Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures Department at the University of Virginia. Schweig's work focuses on the devotional theistic traditions of India, love mysticism in world religions, and the psychology of religion. His two most recent books are *Dance of Divine Love: India's Classic Sacred Love Story: The Rāsa Līlā of Krishna* (Princeton University Press, 2005) and *Bhagavad Gita: The Beloved Lord's Secret Love Song* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2007).

**Donna M. Wulff** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University. Together with John Stratton Hawley she has edited the book *Devī: Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), which is widely used in teaching courses on gender studies and religion. Her special field is Bengali Vaishnavism and *kīrtana*, and her study of Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Vidagdha-mādhava* is now considered a classic in western Vaishnava scholarship.



# Gaudiya Vaishnavism & Iskcon

## An Anthology of Scholarly Perspectives

Steven J. Rosen

The Journal of Vaishnava Studies (JVS) began as a small scholarly enterprise in 1992 and blossomed into one of Hinduism's most successful academic journals, with articles that are used as required reading in universities worldwide. Its focus is on the many Vaishnava lineages of India, including cutting-edge research by leading scholars in the field. Culled from the vast JVS archives, the present volume offers a variety of well-informed papers on the history, philosophy, and cultures of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. It also explores this tradition's contemporary and most far-reaching manifestation: the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Thus, the insightful articles found here unveil the many layers of the rich theistic tradition known throughout the world as "the Hare Krishna Movement."



Steven J. Rosen (Satyajara Dasa) is an initiated disciple of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Rosen is founder and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Vaishnava Studies, an academic periodical esteemed by scholars around the world, and associate editor of Back to Godhead, the magazine of the Hare Krishna Movement. His recent books include *Essential Hinduism* (Prager, 2006) and *Black Lotus: The Spiritual Journey of an Urban mystic* (Hari-Nama Press, 2007).

ISBN 81-8403-029-0



9 788184 030297

RAS BIHARI LAL & SONS  
LOI BAZAR  
VRINDABAN, INDIA

